



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



FRIDAY — 27 MAY 2022

	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	05/27 Day 93 of the Russia invasion 05/27 Hope for diplomacy end Russia invasion? 05/27 Russia attacks Ukraine strongholds in east 05/27 China mines more coal than ever 05/27 Fiji joins Indo-Pacific economic platform 05/27 DRC refugees stream over Uganda border 05/27 WHO: 200 monkeypox cases, 20 countries 05/26 What constitutes victory in Ukraine? 05/26 Ukraine fighters take to electric bikes 05/26 Ukraine fighters in east feel abandoned 05/26 Russia forces continue strikes on Kharkiv 05/26 Russia military eyes old equipment, troops 05/26 Bodies secretly removed from sunken ship? 05/26 WHO members condemn Russia 05/26 US won't yield to lift Russia sanctions 05/26 Russia economy declines but ruble soars? 05/26 Obstacles: Europe alternatives Russia gas 05/26 Japan to reopen to foreign tourists 05/26 Economic impact China 'zero-Covid' policy 05/26 Lebanon spy chief: US seeks help 05/26 Congo: M23 rebels attack military base 05/26 Senegal: 11 babies killed in hospital fire 05/26 Toronto police kill man w/rifle near school	05/26 Outrage as NRA to gather in Houston 05/26 Texas police scrutinized in response 05/26 Uvalde struggles under a heavy cloud 05/26 Border Patrol agents as heroes, villains 05/26 Texas parents angry over police response 05/26 Covid-19 headed to seasonality? 05/26 NY school vaccine mandate survives 05/26 Dominant variant: omicron, delta combo 05/26 Racial disparities in baby formula shortage 05/26 Holiday travel amid record-high gas prices 05/26 Protected against monkeypox? 05/26 CDC: 9 monkeypox cases in 7 states 05/26 Long delays imaging of cancers, diseases 05/26 Court okays greenhouse gas cost estimates 05/26 Schools brace: crisis in meal programs 05/26 Wall Street bounces back; healthy gains 05/26 US strategy on China: shape environment 05/26 New system for migrants apply for asylum	05/26 Monitor: SPD still under consent decree 05/26 PCSD active-shooter drills in schools 05/26 Students walk out, protest gun violence 05/26 Blaine schools cancel classes for 2nd day 05/26 Parents struggle: baby formula shortage 05/26 Seattle population drops, Redmond rises 05/26 Sound Transit extends 'fare ambassador' 05/26 Homebuyers in WA face new shock 05/26 Lakewood PD settles forceful arrest 05/26 Seattle neighborhood in 'tactical urbanism' 05/26 Olympia free RV encampment parking 05/26 Edmonds criminalizes public homelessness 05/26 Delta cuts flights to 'relieve pressure' 05/26 SEA wildlife trafficking awareness initiative
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	05/27 Online child sex abuse at record levels 05/27 Magniber ransomware upgraded for Win11 05/26 Ransomware delays India airline planes	05/26 Social media, Texas shooter's messages 05/26 Young gunmen turn to new social networks 05/26 Face search engine alarmingly accurate 05/26 Intuit warns of QuickBooks phishing 05/26 Extortion market gets into ransomware 05/26 Ransomware disrupts NJ county services 05/26 Credential-stuffing attacks, breaches rise 05/26 FBI alert: exposure of education credentials	
Terror Conditions Go to articles		05/26 Rise, fall environmentalist underground ELF	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	05/26 Sandstorm wave sweeps Middle East	05/27 Fed agent knew Buffalo shooter's plans? 05/26 Secret US plans for apocalyptic scenarios	05/26 Centralia cemetery cleanup surprise graves
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	05/26 Brazil outrage: police asphyxiate man in car	05/27 Texas officer defends police (in)action 05/26 Gunman's final 90min. fuel questions 05/26 Criticism over police response mounts 05/26 Officials' accounts on shooting change 05/26 Police face shooting response questions 05/26 Gunman messages dozen before shooting 05/26 Arrests: Texas copycat school threats 05/26 NY busts luxury goods shoplifting ring 05/26 DOJ: no charges in botched Nassar probe 05/25 Stupefying tally of American gun violence 05/25 Victims of the school shooting in Texas	05/26 Police: shooting in SODO injures 1 05/26 Police: fatal shooting Spanaway store 05/26 Concerns: chop shops in South Sound 05/26 Arrest: Uber human smuggling scheme 05/26 Pro-abortion group vandalizes churches 05/26 Man pleads guilty Seattle hate crime arson 05/26 CBP seize 1,400lbs meth aboard small boat

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Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/27 Russia attacks Ukraine strongholds in east
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-donetsk-9c8eff24e02f795fd411a3edb968c926

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces on Friday pounded the last Ukrainian strongholds in a separatist-controlled eastern province of Ukraine, including a city where authorities said 1,500 people have been killed and 60% of residential buildings destroyed since the start of the war.

Ukraine's foreign minister warned that without a new injection of foreign weapons, Ukrainian forces would not be able to stop Russia from seizing Sievierodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk, locations that are crucial to Russia's goal of capturing all of Ukraine's industrial Donbas region.

The cities are the last areas under Ukrainian control in Luhansk, one of two provinces that make up the region. Russian forces have made slow but persistent advances as they bombarded and sought to encircle both Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk.

"The Russians are pounding residential neighborhoods relentlessly," regional governor Serhiy Haidai wrote in a Telegram post Friday. "The residents of Sievierodonetsk have forgotten when was the last time there was silence in the city for at least half an hour."

Russian shelling killed four people in the city over the past 24 hours, he said.

Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk said late Thursday that at least 1,500 people have been killed in Sievierodonetsk since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. About 12,000 to 13,000 remain in the city – down from a pre-war population of about 100,000 – and 60% of residential buildings have been destroyed, he said.

Stryuk said a Russian reconnaissance and sabotage group entered a city hotel, and that the main road between neighboring Lysychansk and the city of Bakhmut to the southwest remains open, but travel is dangerous. He said only 12 people were able to be evacuated Thursday.

In Donetsk, the Donbas region's other province, Russia-backed rebels claimed Friday to have taken control of Lyman, a large railway hub north of two more key cities that remained under Ukrainian control. There was no immediate confirmation from Ukrainian officials.

With Ukraine's hopes of stopping the Russian advance fading, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba pleaded with Western nations to provide his country with more weapons so its defenders were equipped to "push (the Russian forces) back."

"We need heavy weapons. The only position where Russia is better than us, it's the amount of heavy weapons they have. Without artillery, without multiple launch rocket systems we won't be able to push them back," Kuleba said in a video posted on Twitter Thursday night.

He said the situation in the east was "even worse than people say. ... If you really care for Ukraine, weapons, weapons and weapons again."

In his nightly address to the nation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had some harsh words for the European Union, which has not agreed on a sixth round of sanctions that includes an embargo on Russian oil.

"Of course, I am grateful to our friends who are promoting new sanctions," the Ukrainian leader said. "But where did those who block the sixth package get so much power? Why are they still allowed to have so much power, including in intra-European procedures?"

Zelenskyy said Russia's offensive in the Donbas could leave its communities in ashes and uninhabitable. He accused Moscow of pursuing "an obvious policy of genocide" through mass deportations and killings of civilians.

On Thursday, Russian shelling of Kharkiv, a northeastern city that has been under assault while Ukrainian forces keep the invading troops out, killed nine people, including a father and his 5-month-old baby, the president said.

	<p>Associated Press reporters saw the bodies of at least two dead men and four wounded at a central subway station, where the victims were taken as shelling continued outside.</p> <p>Zelenskyy also spoke bluntly about what's at stake in the battle for eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>"Pressure on Russia is literally a matter of saving lives," he said. "And every day of delay, weakness, various disputes or proposals to 'appease' the aggressor at the expense of the victim is new killed Ukrainians. And new threats to everyone on our continent."</p> <p>Moscow pressed the West on Thursday to lift sanctions already imposed over the war, seeking to shift the blame for a growing global food crisis that has been worsened by Kyiv's inability to ship millions of tons of grain and other agricultural products while under attack.</p> <p>Britain immediately accused Russia of "trying to hold the world to ransom," insisting there would be no sanctions relief, and a top U.S. diplomat blasted the "sheer barbarity, sadistic cruelty and lawlessness" of the invasion.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/27 WHO: 200 monkeypox cases, 20 countries
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/health-united-nations-epidemics-world-organization-5f502a613163d5c71e5bd7130eba3a03
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — The World Health Organization says nearly 200 cases of monkeypox have been reported in more than 20 countries not usually known to have outbreaks of the unusual disease, but described the epidemic as "containable" and proposed creating a stockpile to equitably share the limited vaccines and drugs available worldwide.</p> <p>During a public briefing on Friday, the U.N. health agency said there are still many unanswered questions about how the current epidemic arose, but there is no evidence that any genetic changes in the virus are responsible for the unprecedented epidemic.</p> <p>"The first sequencing of the virus shows that the strain is not different from the strains we can find in endemic countries and (this outbreak) is probably due more to a change in human behaviour," said Dr. Sylvie Briand, WHO's director of pandemic and epidemic diseases.</p> <p>Earlier this week, a top adviser to WHO said the outbreak in Europe, U.S., Israel, Australia and beyond was likely linked to sex at two recent raves in Spain and Belgium. That marks a significant departure from the disease's typical pattern of spread in central and western Africa, where people are mainly infected by animals like wild rodents and primates, and outbreaks haven't spilled across borders.</p> <p>On Friday, Spanish authorities said the number of cases there had risen to 98, including one woman, whose infection is "directly related" to a chain of transmission that had been previously limited to men, according to officials in the region of Madrid.</p> <p>Doctors in Britain, Spain, Portugal, Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere have noted that the majority of infections to date have been in gay and bisexual men, or men who have sex with men. The disease is no more likely to affect people because of their sexual orientation and scientists warn the virus could infect others if transmission isn't curbed.</p> <p>WHO's Briand said that based on how past outbreaks of the disease in Africa have evolved, the current situation appeared "containable."</p> <p>Still, she said WHO expected to see more cases reported in the future, noting "we don't know if we are just seeing the peak of the iceberg (or) if there are many more cases that are undetected in communities," she said.</p>

As countries including Britain, Germany, Canada and the U.S. begin evaluating how smallpox vaccines might be used to curb the outbreak, WHO said its expert group was assessing the evidence and would provide guidance soon.

Dr. Rosamund Lewis, head of WHO's smallpox department, said that "there is no need for mass vaccination," explaining that monkeypox does not spread easily and typically requires skin-to-skin contact for transmission. No vaccines have been specifically developed against monkeypox, but WHO estimates that smallpox vaccines are about 85% effective.

She said countries with vaccine supplies could consider them for those at high risk of the disease, like close contacts of patients or health workers, but that monkeypox could mostly be controlled by isolating contacts and continued epidemiological investigations.

Given the limited global supply of smallpox vaccines, WHO's emergencies chief Dr. Mike Ryan said the agency would be working with its member countries to potentially develop a centrally controlled stockpile, similar to the ones it has helped manage to distribute during outbreaks of yellow fever, meningitis, and cholera in countries that can't afford them.

"We're talking about providing vaccines for a targeted vaccination campaign, for targeted therapeutics," Ryan said. "So the volumes don't necessarily need to be big, but every country may need access to a small amount of vaccine."

Most monkeypox patients experience only fever, body aches, chills and fatigue. People with more serious illness may develop a rash and lesions on the face and hands that can spread to other parts of the body.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/27 China mines more coal than ever
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/27/china-methane-coal-climate-change/
GIST	<p>China's ramping up of its reliance on coal-fueled power plants over fears of an energy crunch already had climate experts worried, but now a study shows that the renewed mining will boost levels of a greenhouse gas even more potent than carbon dioxide — methane.</p> <p>The increased production and expanded capacity from mines is on track to add 10 percent to worldwide emissions of coal-mining methane, threatening to undermine international efforts to tackle global warming, according to the estimate released this week by Global Energy Monitor, a San Francisco-based nongovernmental organization that tracks fossil fuel projects.</p> <p>While it is the carbon dioxide released by burning coal that has garnered most of the attention in the fight against climate change, methane by volume has far larger short-term effects on atmospheric temperature. Over a 100-year period, the global warming potential of the colorless and odorless gas is about 25 times that of CO2. Over 20 years, the impact is about 80 times as large.</p> <p>The study found that China's efforts to dig out more coal had already released about 2.5 million tons of additional methane from mines since late last year when the government ordered more output to end an energy crunch.</p> <p>Newly proposed projects from the mining boom could add the same production capacity as that of Indonesia, the world's third-largest coal producer, and threaten to release an additional 6 million tons of methane per year, a 10 percent increase of the global total for coal mine methane, according to the authors' estimates. Some of the projects are mega-mines that will extract the black rock from deep underground, a process that produces more methane than surface mining.</p>

“China’s frenzy of new mine development is creating hundreds of new sources of methane emissions. While making recent strides to meet its climate goals, China still needs to reckon with the potential fallout from a short-term mining boom,” said Ryan Driskell Tate, co-author of the study.

Despite China’s rapid scaling up of wind and solar power sources, thermal power generators that rely on burning coal still account for the majority of the country’s energy supply. This carbon-intensive model of economic growth means China is the world’s largest emitter of carbon dioxide, accounting for a third of global emissions in 2021.

Getting China, India and other countries to rein in their coal use was a major focus of the much heralded environmental Conference of the Parties at Glasgow in 2021. China pledged to peak its emissions before 2030 and stop building coal power plants abroad, but with its fears over energy security, it is using coal more than ever.

Late last year, power shortages forced local governments to ration electricity across the country as coal-fired power plants failed to keep up with soaring demand. Residential power in some cities was briefly cut, and factory activity was staggered to ration power.

The government responded with an emergency coal production plan, causing China to hit a record output of 4.07 billion tons for 2021. China already consumes and produces about half the world’s coal.

In recent years, a growing body of research on atmospheric methane has suggested coal mining has been underestimated as a producer of the greenhouse gas and may be as consequential as leaks from oil and gas production, the other main industrial sources.

Tate said an aggressive program of capturing and using methane, where a drainage and vent system is used to extract and store the gas from mines, could reduce the damage of new projects, but there are few signs this approach is widely used.

“From the perspective of mining companies, methane is not a commercial product, it’s a waste. They just want to get it out of the mine as fast as possible,” he said. “It’s a global blind spot, but in China, because of the scale of their [coal] industry, the problem is huge.”

The International Energy Agency has said that coal mine methane must fall by 11 percent each year until 2030 to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Part of the difficulty in estimating the scale of the problem is that mining companies do not necessarily track methane output regularly or accurately. Abandoned mines can also continue to release the gas.

Global Energy Monitor uses a project-level database looking at the depth and scale of individual mines, combined with a peer-reviewed emissions estimation methodology, to find the probable methane output.

Its first global assessment, published in March, found that global emissions of coal-mining methane were about 52.3 million tons per year, with a climate impact similar to that of carbon dioxide emissions from all China’s coal plants. China’s leading coal-mining province, Shanxi, produces nearly the same amount of coal-mining methane as the rest of the world combined.

Beijing declined to sign on to a global methane reduction pledge in Glasgow last year, but China and the United States agreed to jointly work to better monitor and control methane emissions in the 2020s. As part of the deal, China pledged to develop a national action plan to reduce methane emissions by 2030.

The two nations were meant to meet in the first half of 2022 to discuss measurement and mitigation of methane. While some Chinese state-owned natural gas giants have released plans to reduce emissions, there are few examples of similar plans in the coal-mining sector, China’s main source of the greenhouse gas.

	<p>Faced with limited data on Chinese methane emissions — the last official figures for annual output are from 2014 — researchers are increasingly turning to satellites to track the nation’s progress in curbing the greenhouse gas.</p> <p>A study using observation data from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency published in 2019 found that from 2010 to 2015, there was no detectable flattening or decline in methane release from coal mines during that period, despite new regulations meant to reduce emissions.</p> <p>“In China in general, there’s a huge emphasis, and rightly so, on air-quality problems, a lot of which are due to coal burning creating pollutants like urban smog. Whereas gases like methane, they contribute to climate change long term, but they don’t necessarily have that health impact,” said Scot Miller, an assistant professor of environmental health and engineering at Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>“The things that can be seen and have a direct impact on public health are taking on a higher priority in China compared to longer-term climate-related trends,” he added.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Wall Street bounces back; healthy gains
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/05/26/stock-market-interest-rates-recession/
GIST	<p>Wall Street posted healthy gains Thursday as technology and retail stocks bounced back, powering the beaten-down Nasdaq index up 2.7 percent and putting more distance between the S&P 500 and a bear market.</p> <p>The Dow Jones industrial average surged 516.91 points, or about 1.6 percent, to close at 32,637.19 and chalk up its fifth consecutive day of gains. The broader S&P 500 index climbed 79.11 points, or 2 percent, to settle at 4,057.84. The tech-heavy Nasdaq surged 305.91 points to end at 11,740.65.</p> <p>Investors have been struggling to shake off the gloomy economic markers — soaring inflation, rising interest rates, the war in Ukraine, the pandemic — that have largely defined 2022. The S&P 500 briefly tipped into bear market territory, defined as a 20 percent fall from the most recent high, in intraday trading last week. As of Wednesday, its 100th trading day of the year, it can now claim the worst start to any year since 1970, according to an analysis by LPL Financial.</p> <p>But with Thursday’s performance, the broad index has cut its year-to-day losses to 16.5 percent. The rally could signal the start of a more meaningful recovery, said Ryan Detrick, LPL Financial chief market strategist.</p> <p>“The good news is previous bad starts have seen some nice rubber-band snap backs, and 2022 could be in line to do it once again,” he said.</p> <p>The stock market gains were led by tech stocks and a handful of retailers. Amazon jumped 4 percent while Facebook’s parent, Meta Platforms, added 4.2 percent.</p> <p>Macy’s soared 19.4 percent after the department store chain released better-than-expected revenue and earnings in the fiscal first quarter and raised its profit outlook for 2022. Williams-Sonoma and Dollar Tree also posted double-digit gains. Last week, market volatility that had been closely aligned with the tech giants shifted to retailers after major players like Walmart and Target warned that rising fuel and compensation costs were eating into profit.</p> <p>While investors have cause for celebration this week, the economic environment still stands in sharp contrast with the heady weeks and months of last year, when stock prices shattered record after record, even as pandemic-era disruptions continued to weigh on social and business life.</p> <p>Economic data released Thursday by the Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that the U.S. economy contracted by 1.5 percent in the first quarter, a slightly larger drop than previously estimated.</p>

Energy prices also climbed, reflecting the continued global impact of the war in Ukraine. West Texas Intermediate crude, the U.S. benchmark, rose 3.4 percent to more than \$114 per barrel. Brent crude, the global benchmark, jumped 3.6 percent to well over \$117. Meanwhile, fuel prices continue to break records: The U.S. average hit \$4.60 a gallon on Thursday, according to AAA.

Meanwhile, investors are worried about rising interest rates. The Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark interest rate twice this year and is expected to do so five more times to ease inflationary pressures. Fed officials have been attempting to pace increases so as not to smother economic growth, a difficult balance to strike. If the economy cools too quickly, it could fall into a recession, generally defined as two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth.

Meanwhile, central bankers have also cautioned that geopolitical events and lingering supply chain constraints are beyond the control of its monetary toolbox.

Thursday's comeback on Wall Street arrives as investors have watched their portfolios slide all year, eating into their 401(k) retirement accounts. After enjoying the bounty of record profits, fueled by unprecedented government stimulus to save the economy from the worst shocks of the [coronavirus](#) pandemic, many shareholders have since fled the market or are bracing for even steeper losses.

European indexes climbed after new [fiscal stimulus measures](#) were unveiled in the United Kingdom. The benchmark Stoxx 600 index closed up 0.8 percent, the FTSE 100 added 0.6 percent in Britain. The German DAX popped 1.6 percent, and France's CAC jumped 1.8 percent.

Asian markets closed mixed Thursday, with the Hang Seng Index dipping 0.3 percent in Hong Kong, the Shanghai Composite index adding 0.5 percent and the Nikkei dipping 0.3 percent in Japan.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Border Patrol agents as heroes, villains
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/akv57j/border-patrol-agents-texas-shooting
GIST	<p>In the chaotic hours after an 18-year-old gunman went on a rampage at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, killing 19 young children and two teachers, a narrative emerged about a heroic Border Patrol agent who stopped the massacre before it got any worse.</p> <p>The agent, initial reports said, was off-duty and hurried to the scene of the shooting, then charged in without waiting for backup and single-handedly took out the gunman, who'd barricaded himself inside a classroom. The purported act of selflessness and courage was a balm for an otherwise unthinkable tragedy—at least one cop did his job and saved lives.</p> <p>But that's not what really happened.</p> <p>It's now clear that crucial minutes ticked by—around an hour—as police stood outside Robb Elementary while the gunman, Salvador Ramos, went on a killing spree inside a fourth-grade classroom. Dozens of Border Patrol agents did respond to support local officers, but it was a four-man team of tactical agents who went in together. And while their actions were undoubtedly heroic, one witness, a 10-year-old boy, has come forward to say the cops inadvertently helped the gunman identify another victim to shoot.</p> <p>In the aftermath of the worst school shooting in Texas history, multiple law enforcement agencies now face hard questions about why they failed to stop the gunman from entering the school and why it took so long to confront him after he was inside and killing children. Authorities now acknowledge a significant amount of time elapsed between when Ramos entered the school wielding an AR-15-style rifle and when he was killed by Border Patrol agents.</p>

At a press conference Thursday, Victor Escalon, South Texas regional director for the Department of Public Safety, said that after an initial exchange of gunfire with the gunman as he entered the school and traversed the hallways, the initial police officers on the scene retreated and called for backup, including a Border Patrol tactical team. “Approximately an hour later,” Escalon said, Border Patrol agents arrived and killed Ramos. Escalon said there was “a lot of gunfire in the beginning” and that officers were subsequently “kept at bay” by additional shots. He did not offer additional explanation for why officers didn’t try to enter more quickly.

“There’s a lot going on,” Escalon said. “It’s a complex situation.”

A spokesperson for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the parent agency of Border Patrol, responded to questions from VICE News about the timeline of events and the actions of agents who killed the gunman by referring to a statement by CBP Commissioner Chris Magnus.

“CBP responded immediately to the incident with local law enforcement,” Magnus said. “Many of our local CBP personnel live in Uvalde; they call this community home, and they work to protect their families, friends and neighbors every single day. We continue to coordinate closely with our federal, state and local partners in the aftermath of this senseless tragedy.”

Border Patrol agents are undoubtedly part of the fabric of the community in Uvalde, located about 70 miles east of the Del Rio port of entry on the Mexican border. But whether the immigration enforcers ought to be considered heroes depends largely on who’s asked.

Over 70 percent of Uvalde’s residents identified as Hispanic or Latino, according to 2022 census data, and while many families are multi-generational U.S. citizens, there are mixed-status households that include people at risk of arrest and deportation. And for those without the proper immigration documents, life in a small town crawling with Border Patrol agents was already stressful enough before the horrific events of this week.

People without legal status in Uvalde could be cut off from accessing trauma counseling, food relief, and other emergency services—or even too afraid to go outside and collectively mourn with others in their community, said Sarah Valdes, director of released unaccompanied children services at RAICES, a Texas nonprofit that provides legal services to immigrants.

“Can you imagine being in this community and having this happen to you or your friends and neighbors and not being able to go out and drive because you’re afraid?” Valdes asked. “I’m concerned about the practicalities of people being cut off from school lunches or medical assistance, but there’s an emotional side of it too. You’re cut off from being able to be in a shared space with your neighbors.”

Valdes said local Border Patrol agents in Uvalde have been “complicit” in Operation Lone Star, a campaign launched in March of 2021 by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ostensibly to help stop drug and migrant smuggling. While Border Patrol is a federal agency that does not answer to Abbott or state officials, Valdes said there have been people with little or no criminal history picked up by Border Patrol in the Uvalde area in the past year or so and turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE for deportation, or removal from the country under a policy known as Title 42.

She read a message from a colleague that works with clients in the area. “We’ve had several clients picked up by Border Patrol in that area and turned over to ICE even after they’ve been in the U.S. for years,” Valdes said, relaying the message to VICE News over the phone.

On Wednesday, the federal Department of Homeland Security, which encompasses ICE, CBP, and Border Patrol, issued a statement saying Uvalde had been declared a “protected area” and that agents would avoid immigration enforcement “to the fullest extent possible” so that all residents of the community can access services without fear.

But Adam Isaacson, director of defense oversight at WOLA, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that promotes human rights in Latin America, said a promise from federal immigration authorities may no longer be trusted after years of hardline enforcement.

“Even when CBP says they’re making an exception, as is the case in Uvalde today, undocumented people have very little reason to take that assurance at face value,” Isaacson said. “The track record has not been one of building trust with these communities.”

The tension that exists in Uvalde is present all over the U.S. in communities with people without legal immigration status, Isaacson said. While Uvalde is an hour’s drive away from the border, it falls within a 100-mile zone that gives federal agents broad latitude to operate, including by setting up immigration checkpoints.

“The dynamic is similar in any ‘non-sanctuary’ U.S. city where the undocumented population lives in fear of ending up in ICE custody for something so minor as a busted taillight,” Isaacson said. “People cannot access services because it may end up being the last thing they do in the United States.”

On the other side of the equation are Border Patrol agents who live and work in Uvalde, many with kids enrolled in local schools, including Robb Elementary. Around 80 agents from the community and surrounding area converged on the scene of the shooting, according to the sector’s chief agent, who spoke at a press conference Wednesday.

A CBP official told VICE News the gunman was killed by a member of Border Patrol’s elite BORTAC special operations unit, the agency’s equivalent to a SWAT team. Two other BORTAC members were involved in storming the classroom where the gunman was barricaded, along with a member of BORSTAR, a specialized search and rescue unit. One BORTAC member held up a shield while the other agents engaged with the gunman and shot him dead.

Members of other law enforcement agencies were present and part of the tactical “stack” formation that entered the school, but it’s still unclear how many, and what their actions were during the confrontation with the gunman. Also still unexplained is how he was able to evade a school resource officer and local cops and get into the school through a back door, then lock himself inside a classroom, where he apparently had plenty of time to methodically gun down the 9- and 10-year-olds he found inside.

One 10-year-old witness, who was hiding under a tablecloth inside the room where it happened, told San Antonio TV news network KENS that the agents who entered the classroom made a deadly mistake by asking any survivors in hiding to call out for help.

“When the cops came, the cop said: ‘Yell if you need help!’ And one of the persons in my class said ‘help,’” the boy told KENS. “The guy overheard and he came in and shot her. The cop barged into that classroom. The guy shot at the cop. And the cops started shooting.”

CBP officials have not addressed the boy’s allegations and did not directly respond to questions from VICE News about the possibility that the agents inadvertently helped the gunman identify another victim before he was killed.

Jon Anfinson, president of Local 2366 of the National Border Patrol Council, the union that represents Border Patrol employees in the Del Rio sector, told VICE News that the agents who arrived on the scene entered the school as quickly as possible. Anfinson said he’s seen no evidence to confirm the preliminary reports that a lone Border Patrol agent went in without backup, but said one of the first to take action was a BORTAC member who coordinated forming the “stack” to enter the school.

“It wasn’t like BORTAC showed up and everyone went in,” Anfinson said. “They pieced it together. Generally in training they undergo scenarios that involve people from multiple agencies showing up and going in, and it sounds like that’s what happened here.”

Anfinsen said other agents, including some who were off-duty, acted bravely by working to extract children from classrooms as the shootout was still unfolding.

“Dozens of agents from the community and from surrounding communities all showed up, some were helping get children out of classrooms while gunfire was happening,” Anfinsen said. “Everyone converged on the scene as quickly as they could possibly get there.”

But whether the agents acted quickly enough after arriving is now under scrutiny. Parents who arrived at the shooting scene have been quoted as saying law enforcement members stood on the sidelines and ignored their pleas to take action, restraining fathers who tried to break through the perimeter to defend their children themselves. Parents were reportedly pepper-sprayed, thrown to the ground, and handcuffed as they tried to get inside the school.

"The dads were saying, 'Give me the vest, I'll go in there!'" one witness told the New York Times.

A Border Patrol agent was wounded by gunfire during the shootout and is among the 17 injured survivors. A CBP official could not confirm to VICE News that the wounded agent is the one who killed the gunman, as Texas' governor said was the case on Wednesday.

As for whether Border Patrol is a welcome presence in Uvalde, Anfinsen, 41 and a town resident himself, said there is widespread support for the agency. Many agents who work in the Del Rio sector call Uvalde home, he said, and are involved as coaches and community leaders. Ansinger said that as far as he knows, migrants usually pass through Uvalde on the way to other parts of the country.

“Border Patrol is well liked in Uvalde,” Anfinsen said. “We have dozens and dozens of agents who live there. We have agents' families who are teachers and students in the community. They volunteer as coaches. We have a lot of agents there. They've been pro-Border Patrol for forever.”

The Del Rio sector became the focus of public outrage last fall when photographs went viral showing Border Patrol agents mounted on horseback using reins to whip Haitian migrants and force them back across the Rio Grande. Anfinsen defended the agents at the time, saying they were “thrown under the bus” by the Biden administration, which took the agents off duty and ordered an investigation, which remains ongoing.

Anfinsen said the Border Patrol, which typically looks for migrants attempting to cross illegally between ports of entry, is understaffed and spread too thin in his sector. The agents, he said, have been dealing with a large influx of migrants due to confusion around Title 42, a policy that blocks asylum seekers from entering the U.S., which the Biden administration tried unsuccessfully to rollback on May 23.

After working long shifts, Anfinsen said, some agents responded to the scene at Robb Elementary and are still struggling to process the horror they encountered.

“The town is devastated, obviously,” he said. “It's not just families and friends who lost children, we have to deal with all the first responders, law enforcement, EMS, firefighters—we had agents who had to help carry children's bodies out of the school. It's terrible.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 SEA wildlife trafficking awareness initiative
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/wildlife-trafficking-awareness-initiative-launches-at-seattle-tacoma/
GIST	Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA), the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' Wildlife Trafficking Alliance (WTA), Woodland Park Zoo, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park are partnering to unveil a first-of-its-kind interactive installation to help stop wildlife trafficking.

	<p>Arriving just in time for the summer travel season, recovery of international travel, and the opening of the airport's new International Arrivals Facility, the educational display empowers international travelers to prevent wildlife trafficking in how they shop, eat and experience while abroad. Located across from Gate S1, the display is in the S Concourse, SEA's hub for departing international flights.</p> <p>The installation invites travelers to be good stewards of global animal populations and follow the law with a pledge to be a "savvy traveler" who makes choices that help save endangered animals around the world. The contents of the display share examples of confiscated illegally trafficked materials and information about how animal species are in decline due to illegal wildlife trade. It also shares the positive impacts of conservation and educational efforts. The wildlife artifacts were selected to highlight the diversity of items that travelers may encounter. Some wildlife items were paired with sustainable look-alikes to highlight the existence of legal alternatives and the challenges of identifying wildlife products without knowing the right questions to ask.</p> <p>"The illegal wildlife trade is estimated to generate \$20 billion USD annually in illegal proceeds," said University of Washington Center for Environmental Forensic Science Co-Executive Director and Professor of Biology Dr. Sam Wasser. "The illegal ivory trade is estimated to generate \$4 billion annually. Most of the smuggled ivory consists of whole, unworked tusks. The tusks are bought and stockpiled by investors who appear to be banking on elephants going extinct so that ivory can once again be legally sold. While law enforcement plays a critical role in stopping illegal trade, the ease with which large volumes of ivory can be moved across the world makes it unlikely that law enforcement can stop the trade on its own. The only sustainable solution is to permanently eliminate demand. Please help us achieve that goal."</p> <p>The installation at SEA is a pilot project for AZA's Wildlife Trafficking Alliance, which will be followed by two additional exhibits in 2022 at key U.S. airports. Pending project evaluation, WTA will seek additional exhibits in subsequent years in the U.S., and beyond.</p> <p>Additional partners supporting the SEA installation include the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the University of Washington Center for Environmental Forensic Science.</p>
Return to Top	Read more at the Port of Seattle

HEADLINE	05/26 Schools brace: crisis in meal programs
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2022-05-26/its-going-to-be-catastrophic-schools-brace-for-crisis-over-meal-programs
GIST	<p>When Penny Parham, the food and nutrition officer for Miami-Dade Public Schools, began courting bids for its main food distribution service – the one that provides groceries on a weekly basis so that the fourth-largest school district in the country can serve upward of 35 million meals each year – she didn't expect any problems.</p> <p>Despite the supply chain woes wreaking havoc on school districts across the country, including Miami-Dade's, a lot of companies participated in the pre-bid conference, she said. And besides, in her more than 20 years as head of the district's school nutrition program, she couldn't ever recall not receiving a bid.</p> <p>But that's exactly what happened. And while the school board took swift action to allow for direct negotiations – a move Parham credits for having a contract now nearly finalized – the occurrence underscores the precarious footing upon which school nutrition directors across the country find themselves.</p> <p>"It's just been very disrupting and very, very out of the ordinary," she says. "It's been a year unlike any."</p> <p>Across the country, school districts large and small are experiencing crises of their own: In Fort Worth, Texas, a spreadsheet 400 lines long detailing food that's out of stock; in Lansing, Michigan, a four-hour phone call to place food orders that used to take just 20 minutes; in Cleveland, 67 unfilled positions in the school nutrition division; and in the thousands of suburban and rural districts that dot the country,</p>

shipments delivered with a fraction of the expected food items, forcing nutrition directors to dip into emergency funds, drive to the nearest grocery store and purchase items at consumer costs.

Ongoing supply chain disruptions, inflation and rising gas prices produced a maelstrom for school nutrition teams this school year – coming on the heels of a year defined by pandemic-related disruptions that required them to be creative to ensure students were fed, especially in communities with overwhelming food insecurity. Threatening to make matters worse, nutrition waivers that have provided generous reimbursement rates and allowed them flexibility from complying with meal patterns and nutrition standard requirements – waivers that they say have been crucial in allowing school meal programs to operate at all – are set to expire at the end of June, supercharging an already unpredictable landscape.

Now, as in-person learning stabilizes and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona talks about moving beyond COVID-19 along with the rest of society, school nutrition directors and advocates are instead bracing for a new school year that many anticipate will be impossible to navigate without help from Congress.

“The situation is only getting worse,” says Jillien Meier, director of the No Kid Hungry campaign. “We are hearing directly from school state directors that they would have taken the COVID year – that hybrid year, that quarantine year – over what they’re experiencing now and what they anticipate next year.”

“This is dire,” she says. “And they think next year will be worse.”

As it stands, the nutrition waivers, which were approved at the outset of the pandemic, will expire June 30 without congressional action to extend them.

The waivers reimburse schools using a higher rate to cover costs due to supply chain disruptions. This year, most schools receive \$4.56 for each school lunch they serve, instead of the roughly \$3.75 they would receive without the waivers. School nutrition advocates estimate that next school year, the rate will drop to an average of \$2.91, not including the annual inflation adjustment that will be announced this summer.

The waivers also free districts from meeting school meal patterns and nutrition requirements that they would otherwise be financially penalized for not meeting – though they still have to try to comply. In addition, the waivers have allowed schools to serve meals, free of charge, to all children – regardless of whether they qualify for free or reduced-price lunch – as a way to bypass the administrative requirement of gathering applications in order to serve meals to all students at no cost.

“It will be nearly impossible for us to be back to business as usual when the waivers expire,” says Christopher Burkhardt, the executive director of school nutrition at the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. “It’s going to be catastrophic.”

“It’s very troublesome to try to meet the meal pattern and nutrition requirements every single day, and that’s not going to change on July 1,” he says. “If I can get bread, it’s probably not going to be whole grain. I want to serve whole grain bread, my students want whole grain bread. But if the manufacturers can’t make whole grain bread then I’m going to take the next best thing.”

Burkhardt, who oversees the district’s \$23 million annual operating budget for school meals for the city’s 38,000 public school students, says this school year has been unlike any other, operating at the margins, scrambling to fill holes and somehow making it work with 67 part-time staff positions unfilled.

“Every day we get an outage and shortage report from our distributor and literally every day we figure out what the substitute will be,” he says. “On some days it’s relatively easy and on other cases it’s absolutely impossible.”

Of course, it’s not only large urban school districts that are running into problems.

Kim Leung, the nutrition services manager at Tigard-Tualatin School District in Oregon, a suburb that enrolls about 12,000 students, has grown accustomed to receiving shipments that fulfill two of the 30 orders she placed, forcing her to dip into emergency funding almost every week this school year.

“I’ve gone to Costco and bought rice, I’ve gone to Costco and bought paper goods, utensils,” Leung says. “That’s easily 10 times the cost. Instead of it being 30 cents or 20 cents, it might be a dollar.”

Leung says paper goods have been particularly difficult to come by, with cases that used to cost the district \$20 now costing up to \$200.

“The focus for us has been whether we need it,” she says. “We try our best to shop around. But if we need the product, we need the product.”

The expiration of the waivers, Leung says, would translate into the loss of about \$1 million in revenue for her district.

Leung and Burkhardt say they expect school districts to face continued challenges until the 2024-25 school year – two years from now – though they both feel fortunate to be in a position where their school district’s contract with its distributor is nearly finalized for the next school year.

“With that said, we’ve said here is what we want to use and the manufacturer has come back and said, ‘Yeah, we think we can do that,’” Burkhardt says. “But until that truck shows up at our loading dock, we are still being cautious. We know right now on any given day we still have outages and that’s going to get any better two months down the road. We are still going to have the same issue. We know that this isn’t going to be a light switch that will turn on and off even though a lot of us are either seeing or feeling that we’re on the other side of the pandemic. It’s not showing up that way for us.”

For Cleveland, which leads the nation in child poverty among large cities, with nearly half of all children living in poverty in 2019, the nutrition waivers weren’t simply a congressional act of kindness to help float them through the pandemic. The waivers were an actual life line for many families.

“When you look at a community that has a lot of food insecurity it’s really devastating,” Burkhardt says about the waivers expiring. “The school district has really been the safety net for a lot of families over the last couple of years and sadly that is going away. I’m hoping in the eleventh hour we will get some legislation that allows the waivers to go through.”

The omnibus package that Congress passed in March initially included funding to temporarily extend the nutrition waivers, but the provision was stripped by Republican leaders seeking to trim costs. The extension was later introduced as a stand-alone bill – the Support Kids Not Red Tape Act – and has the backing of Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. But it needs additional GOP support to clear a filibuster.

“Feeding kids should not be a partisan issue,” says Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Michigan Democrat and head of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, who introduced the legislation.

“We should make it easier for kids to get the meals they need – not harder,” she says. “As we come out of this pandemic, schools are doing their best. But it takes time for them to transition back to their operations before COVID.”

Democrats are evaluating other potential vehicles for the extension, but prospects look grim given competing domestic crises and the looming midterm elections, which are already scrambling politics as usual.

“We can’t let hungry kids get caught in the middle,” Stabenow says. “Without this support, up to 30 million kids who get food at school will see their essential breakfast and lunch meals disrupted.”

	<p>A report published this week by the Food Research Action Center shows that among the 62 large districts surveyed, 95% reported that the waivers helped reduce child hunger in their school district and upwards of 80% also said the waivers made it easier for parents, eliminated the stigma associated with receiving free school meals, eased administrative work and supported academic achievement.</p> <p>“The reality is if kids aren’t eating nutritious meals, then we will see a decrease in test scores, behavioral issues popping up, absentee issues,” says Michael Gasper, director of nutrition services for the School District of Holmen, a tiny rural school district that serves 4,000 students nestled along the western border of Wisconsin. “It’s a downward spiral we will get ourselves into.”</p> <p>Gasper took advantage of a recent visit to Holmen by Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Wisconsin Democrat, to share with her his biggest fear – that the expiration of the waivers will drive out even more staff and cause school nutrition directors to leave the profession due to how complicated it’s become to operate. He says he’s already given his staff mid-year raises in order to convince them to stay, and another raise of 12% to 14% is set for July.</p> <p>“School nutrition programs across the country have been really innovative in dealing with these issues up to this point,” Gasper says. “We were the ones in communities who really stepped up and made sure kids were fed. I really hope that Congress will give us the tools to finish what we started.”</p> <p>“As much as we all want the pandemic to be behind us, it’s not going to be for a while,” he says. “I hope they don’t handcuff us.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Monitor: SPD still under consent decree
SOURCE	https://publicola.com/2022/05/26/police-monitor-praises-progress-but-does-not-recommend-ending-federal-consent-decree-yet/
GIST	<p>As soon as next year, US Judge James Robart could lift the consent decree with the Seattle Police Department that has been in place since 2012, when the US Department of Justice concluded that SPD routinely used excessive force, engaged in biased policing, and lacked appropriate structures to ensure accountability for bad actors.</p> <p>But the department still has to make significant improvements to its accountability and crowd control practices before seeking release from federal oversight, according to a report released last week by the court-appointed monitor who oversees SPD’s reform efforts, Dr. Antonio Oftelie, and his three-person team.</p> <p>Overall, the monitor’s report found that SPD is in compliance with the consent decree in key areas, including crisis intervention, stops and detentions, and use of force, “except during the waves of protests over the summer of 2020, in which the serious concerns from both the community and the Monitoring Team described herein evidenced a need for further work in the area of policy and training around use of force, force reporting, and force review in large-scale crowd management events.”</p> <p>The report does not deal explicitly with police accountability, which Oftelie told PubliCola is “still very much an open area” in the consent decree that will have to be addressed in the future; however, it notes that Oftelie’s team will conduct an assessment of Seattle’s entire accountability system as part of a larger monitoring plan that could wrap up as soon as the end of this year.</p> <p>“The accountability system in Seattle is one of the best in the country, but it does have certain gaps or areas that could use improvement,” Oftelie said.</p> <p>SPD has been under federal oversight since 2012, after the US Department of Justice determined that the department routinely engaged in unconstitutional policing practices, including bias and excessive use of force, and that it lacked meaningful oversight and accountability mechanisms to address unconstitutional behavior by officers.</p>

Since then, the city has Judge Robart to release it from the consent decree on two occasions, both times unsuccessfully. The most recent request, from former city attorney Pete Holmes and former mayor Jenny Durkan, came in May 2020—just before protests in the wake of George Floyd’s murder in Minneapolis, when police targeted large groups of demonstrators with blast balls, tear gas, and other “less-lethal” weapons, leading to more than 19,000 complaints.

Setting aside the protests, which the report addresses separately, the monitor concluded that SPD has sustained its compliance with the consent decree on use of force, stops and detentions, and how the department responds to people experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

“SPD officers respond to nearly 10,000 people in crisis per year, and Crisis Intervention Teams have dramatically improved interactions and outcomes – with force used in only 1.5 percent of contacts with individuals experiencing crises and many improvements made in connecting individuals in crisis to supportive human services,” the report says. (Crisis Intervention Team officers have gone through special training to respond to behavioral health crisis.)

“And when officers stop or detain a person, they must now articulate the reason for a stop and provide justification for searches,” the report continues. “As a testament to this progress, policing organizations around the nation, to advance their own reforms, have come to Seattle to learn from SPD and adopt policies and best practices in crisis response, de-escalation, and critical decision-making models.”

In a [letter to Oftelie](#) shortly before the monitor released the report, City Council public safety committee chair Lisa Herbold noted that the report also found a sharp increase in the number of people contacted by SPD officers while in crisis more than five times, with the greatest increase among people contacted more than 16 times.

The report also notes that even when it’s impossible to prove officer bias, disturbing racial disparities persist in almost every kind of police contact the report covers. Black and Native American people “are disproportionately stopped, detained, subjected to force,” according to the report, which also notes that officers are more likely to frisk Black people than white people, even though “frisks of White subjects more consistently find weapons.” Officers are also more likely to stop and frisk people when they’re in a neighborhood with more people of a race other than their own, the report found, and more likely to point their guns at Black individuals than people of any other race.

“Significant and persistent racial disparities suggest that continued monitoring of implementation of biasfree policing could result in positive community outcomes,” Herbold wrote.

The report also notes a strikingly high percentage of people—23 percent of those subjected to force, 16 percent of crisis contacts, and 17 percent of people stopped by police—whose race officers recorded as “unknown.” (Excluding the 2020 protests reduces the proportion of “unknown” use-of-force subjects to 15 percent.) The percentage of people of “unknown” race SPD interacted with spiked dramatically starting in mid-2019, when SPD stopped recording “Hispanic” as a racial category, according to the report, and apparently started reporting the race of most Latinos as “unknown.”

The report incorporates findings from several preliminary assessments, which found that officers’ use of force [declined 33 percent between 2015 to 2019 and 48 percent between 2015 to 2021](#), with a more significant reduction in the most serious types of force, such as shooting; that officers responding to people in crisis [rarely resort to force](#), “a dramatic improvement from DOJ investigative findings that led to the Consent Decree”; and that although there are still troubling racial disparities in who gets stopped and detained by police, officers are generally able to articulate “[sufficient legal justification](#)” for their actions by establishing “reasonable suspicion” when stopping or frisking a person.

The consent decree, Oftelie says, does not define aspirational goals for SPD; it establishes a “floor,” not a ceiling, by setting minimum standards for constitutional policing. Although the city council has [groused at times](#) that the consent decree makes it hard for them to pass laws reforming the department—for example,

by transferring some of its duties, and funding, to civilians outside the department—Oftelie argues that “the ceiling is relatively unlimited,” and that the city could impose new rules on SPD—requiring special training on how to deal with people who are walking brandishing knives, for example—without violating the terms of the consent decree.

“I don’t agree that the judge has put any limitations on polices and practice that the city can put in place,” Oftelie said. “It’s situational, but I think that issue has taken on a narrative in the city that’s overblown... I think the community, and maybe sometimes the council, has used the consent decree as an excuse not to innovate new things.”

The report cautions that that the final phase of the consent decree will be “challenging,” and notes that SPD still has work to do to build on the progress it has made and restore trust with Seattle residents, particularly when it comes to protest response and accountability.

“In the comprehensive assessment, we deemed SPD in sustained compliance with use of force exclusive of crowd management, stops and detentions, and crisis intervention—what I didn’t say is that I recommend that these paragraphs in the consent be closed out and terminated,” Oftelie said. “SPD will have to write a new policy for crowd management that takes into consideration state law and the [less-lethal weapons ordinance](#), and that policy will need to be reviewed by the DOJ, the monitor, and ultimately the court.”

The monitoring team outlined a number of steps the city will need to take before seeking to end the consent decree, including the implementation of new crowd control policies recommended by the Office of the Inspector General, the creation of a plan to address “potential bias and unwarranted disparities in policing,” and the selection of a permanent police chief who can improve the culture of SPD, a subject the consent decree does not directly address but which impacts every aspect of policing, from the way officers treat individual protesters to officers’ widespread [refusal to comply](#) with state and local mask mandates.

Meanwhile, “The Seattle City Council must ensure that SPD can train, hire, and provide supervision to qualified and committed personnel; invest in alternative response capabilities; and negotiate a contract with police unions that upholds appropriate working conditions and procedural justice while also bolstering accountability and community trust,” the report says.

Contract negotiations (and police union contracts themselves) have been significant barriers to reform in the past. Although the Seattle Police Management Association, which represents captains and lieutenants, reportedly plans to accept a number of concessions sought by police reform advocates in its contract, SPOG may be poised to move in the opposite direction, doubling down on protections for officers accused of misconduct, for example. If meeting the requirements of the consent decree requires the city to bargain with the police union, it has the potential to slow the whole process to a crawl.

“Ideally, they’d want to come to the court with, ‘Here are the new collective bargaining agreements we’ve signed and they comply with accountability’ requirements, Oftelie said. If that turns out to be impossible—the last time the city negotiated a contract with SPOG, it took four years, and the union walked away with major concessions that contributed to Robart finding SPD out of compliance with the consent decree the following year—the city could find itself under the consent decree for years to come.

Looming over all these discussions is the fact that SPD [continues to lose officers](#) faster than it can hire new ones, limiting the department’s ability to dedicate detectives to investigations and take officers off patrol to attend trainings on new policies and practices. Since 2020, interim chief Adrian Diaz has taken officers and detectives [off specialized duties](#) and assigned them to patrol shifts and 911 response, using overtime to fill gaps in police coverage.

“I would describe the challenge right now with the number of officers as a crisis from the consent decree perspective,” Oftelie said. “Are officers being supervised, is data being analyzed, is force being analyzed at the right level? All those systems are near collapse.”

HEADLINE	05/26 Obstacles: Europe alternatives Russia gas
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-quest-for-alternatives-to-russian-gas-hits-obstacles-in-middle-east-11653579800?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>Europe is hitting roadblocks as it tries to find alternatives to Russian gas in the Middle East and North Africa, as talks with big producers like Qatar, Algeria and Libya have become complicated.</p> <p>The issues that have snarled negotiations range from the pricing of Qatari gas to stability in Libya and the politics of Western Sahara, a disputed North African territory. The challenges mark another indication that Europe will struggle to fully replace energy from Russia, which supplies 38% of the continent's natural gas.</p> <p>Europe faces “a spaghetti junction of policy, politics and geopolitics that could further complicate things,” said Adel Hamaizia, a visiting fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University.</p> <p>Qatar had emerged as one of the best hopes for European countries that are reliant on Russian gas and began looking for alternatives after the invasion of Ukraine prompted the West to sanction Moscow and its institutions. The tiny Persian Gulf emirate is one of the biggest producers of liquefied natural gas in the world and is in the midst of a \$29 billion project aimed at expanding its gas-production capacity by 40%.</p> <p>On trips in recent days to the U.K. and Germany, Qatari ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani signed pacts pledging to deepen energy cooperation with those countries. The hard part, Qatari and European officials said, is negotiating the contracts. Any agreements are likely to involve major concessions from all sides over potentially months of talks, the officials said.</p> <p>Among the sticking points, Qatari energy officials said, is whether Germany—a major hub for European gas—could resell Qatari fuel to other countries, say people briefed on the talks. The Qataris are reluctant about such resales, saying they undercut their market power.</p> <p>Qatar's restrictions on reselling gas has already been the subject of a European Union antitrust investigation into whether the provision illegally restricts cross-border trade. The EU dropped the probe in March and cleared Qatar of wrongdoing, a move that could encourage the emirate to reengage with European buyers.</p> <p>Another problem is that the Qataris have insisted on supply contracts that last over a decade, according to people familiar with the talks. The U.K. and Germany want deals that are closer to five years to comply with energy-transition targets.</p> <p>Germany targets a 65% cut in carbon emissions by 2030 while the U.K. plans to slash emissions by 78% by 2035. Increasing natural-gas consumption could impede their ability to hit those targets.</p> <p>Another major issue has been the price of Qatari LNG, which must be shipped over long distances and is more expensive than Russian gas transported by pipeline.</p> <p>Qatar could be willing to accept shorter contracts for higher prices and diplomatic gains, people familiar with the matter said. In a sign that the natural-gas talks may be part of a broader partnership with London, Qatar has said it would invest 10 billion pounds, equivalent to \$12.6 billion, in the U.K., including in renewables. Qatar has been promoting its LNG as a more reliable option than renewables and a cleaner alternative to coal.</p> <p>German and U.K. government officials said negotiations on LNG supplies from Qatar were under way but declined to comment further. German natural-gas companies Uniper SE and RWE AG declined to comment.</p> <p>Sheikh Tamim's visits to the U.K. and Germany signaled there was political will to make the deals happen, despite the differences over contract details.</p>

Even if Qatar sold all of its new planned natural-gas capacity to Europe in the next few years, it wouldn't offset all of the Russian gas that flows into the continent.

Southern European countries have pinned some hope on more gas supplies from Algeria and Libya—major producers with existing pipelines to Europe. Supplies from both nations are subject to significant political risk.

Spain was in talks with Algeria before the Russian invasion to increase flows of Algerian natural gas via a pipeline that goes through Morocco, under the Mediterranean Sea and into Spain. But Algeria has blocked supplies and has threatened to stop selling gas to Spain altogether because the country recognized Morocco's claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Control of Western Sahara, a territory south of Morocco that is larger than New England, is disputed, with a nationalist movement pushing back against Moroccan governance. Algeria supports a group rebelling against Morocco and is home to camps of refugees from the territory.

In April, supplies from Algeria to Spain dropped 35%. Algeria once made up nearly half of Spain's natural-gas imports; now it accounts for 22%, according to Enagas, the owner and operator of Spain's gas grid. Spain imports costlier U.S. LNG to make up for the shortfall.

Italian energy company Eni SpA has reached an agreement with Algeria to increase volumes of gas to Italy by up to 9 billion cubic meters a year through 2024. Eni is also planning investments in Libya to increase exports to Italy.

But Libya's energy production has been subject to frequent disruptions because of factional disputes following the toppling of strongman Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. On Tuesday, Libya's national oil company said it had halted drilling operations at all fields and ports amid payment delays tied to disagreement between rival politicians.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Russia economy declines but ruble soars?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-economy-is-tankingbut-the-ruble-is-soaring-11653559916?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos3
GIST	<p>Sanctions against Russia have pushed its economy into what could be the biggest decline in decades, but the country's currency has gone the other way.</p> <p>The ruble strengthened this week to levels not seen since 2018, making the currency the second-best performer against the dollar this year, based on a Dow Jones Market Data analysis of 56 currencies, trailing only the Brazilian real. The ruble has risen 16% against the greenback in 2022 and is up nearly 150% since it bottomed out days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine three months ago.</p> <p>Normally, currencies follow economies up or down. In Russia's case, government efforts that limited selling and forced buying pushed it higher, so high in fact that it has started to weigh on the economy.</p> <p>"I wouldn't have anticipated this," said Jane Foley, head of foreign-exchange strategy at Rabobank. "But when you put in the capital controls, you're not looking at something real."</p> <p>Russia has been taking steps to weaken the currency and the latest move might have ended the rally. On Thursday, Russia's central bank lowered interest rates to 11% from 14%, making holding rubles less attractive. That sent the ruble falling 6.7% against the dollar.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Russia eased a capital control that required companies to change 80% of their foreign-currency revenues to rubles. Now they only have to change half.</p>

The Russian currency finished Thursday at nearly 65 rubles to the dollar, weakening from a level of almost 55 rubles per dollar this week. Still, the ruble remains substantially higher than the record intraday low of about 158 reached on March 7, according to data from Tullett Prebon.

Recently, the ruble has bucked a global trend of currencies weakening versus the dollar, which [has been bolstered](#) by rising U.S. interest rates and a strong economy. The euro [has tumbled](#) about 5.7% against the dollar this year, while the British pound has fallen 6.8%.

Economists and traders see the ruble's recovery as partly artificial because of Russia's policies, and partly as a result of Russia's big commodities exports and the impact of sanctions. Besides raising rates and forcing companies to buy rubles, Moscow limited the amount of dollars that Russians could withdraw from foreign-currency bank accounts and barred banks from selling foreign currencies to customers.

The combination of sanctions, which tanked imports, and Russia's commodity exports, which were boosted by high prices, gave the ruble further upward momentum. Russia also demanded European nations [pay for natural gas in rubles](#).

Those efforts came at a cost. The central bank doubled its key interest rate to 20% in the immediate aftermath of [the war](#), essentially rewarding people for holding rubles, but putting further pressure on the economy. Thursday's rate cut was the central bank's third since it raised rates.

A strong currency typically provides benefits to countries, including pushing down inflation and making imports cheaper. But the sanctions against Russia have scrambled the usual dynamics. Russia can't import much because of the sanctions.

Inflation in Russia is also surging due to shortages, with [food prices rising by one-fifth](#) compared with a year ago. Russian workers' wages aren't keeping pace, with real disposable incomes down 1.2% in the first three months of 2022 compared with a year before. Economists expect the Russian economy to contract by around 10% this year.

Meanwhile, the strong ruble threatens to hit the country's budget by reducing the value of oil-and-gas tax revenues that are denominated in dollars.

Jason Tuvey, senior emerging markets economist at Capital Economics, says with Russian energy companies converting foreign-currency payments into rubles, the stronger currency means "you are getting fewer rubles per dollar."

"From a public-finance perspective, all else equal, a strong ruble depresses the local currency value of gas revenues that are recorded in the budget," he said. "This comes at the same time that Russia is facing other pressures, from the cost of the war in Ukraine to increased social spending."

Before Thursday, Russia's maneuvers to weaken the ruble had limited impact. Thursday's rate cut, however, sent the ruble solidly lower for the week. Market watchers say the future path of the outlook for the ruble is harder to glean.

Many note that few investors are trading the ruble. Richard Benson, co-chief investment officer at Millennium Global Investments Ltd., a London-based currency fund manager, said the company made a decision after the invasion that it didn't want to trade the currency. Many clients soon after called and asked for the firm to not trade it based on ESG, or environmental, social and governance, reasons.

Ruble trading volumes have also been difficult to discern. After the war broke out, the ruble market split to have one value within Russia and another on international markets. After the war, many Western banks stopped providing electronic quotes to buy and sell the ruble.

"The list of arguments for not trading the ruble is a long one," said Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, noting ongoing capital controls and sanctions. "Do I think this makes

	<p>sense economically speaking for the ruble to be trading stronger than where it was before the invasion? No.”</p> <p>If Russia wants the currency to fall further, “they could just liberalize capital flows and this thing would weaken drastically,” Mr. Brooks said. “Of course, they won’t do that.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/27 Fiji joins Indo-Pacific economic platform
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/fiji-to-join-bidens-asian-economic-platform-as-pacific-competition-intensifies-11653632348?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>SYDNEY—President Biden’s economic platform to counter China in the Indo-Pacific region expanded to 14 founding members after the U.S. said Fiji had agreed to join, a move that comes on the eve of a visit by Beijing’s top diplomat to the Pacific island nation.</p> <p>The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, launched on Monday, represents the latest effort by the U.S. to intensify engagement in a region that has become an arena for strategic competition between Washington and Beijing in recent years. While the trade initiative included traditional allies like Australia and Japan, along with large economies such as India and Indonesia, it initially lacked the involvement of a Pacific island country in a vast area of ocean that is home to major shipping lanes and fisheries.</p> <p>“A close partner to the U.S. and a leader in the region, Fiji will add vital value and perspective to IPEF, including on our efforts to tackle the climate crisis and build a clean economy that creates good paying jobs,” said Jake Sullivan, U.S. national security adviser.</p> <p>In a statement dated Thursday, Fiji said Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama told Kurt Campbell, the U.S. National Security Council’s coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, in a recent telephone call that he appreciated Mr. Biden’s commitment toward the Pacific’s prosperity.</p> <p>Fiji is one of the largest and most developed countries in the South Pacific, and home to many of the aid agencies that support less affluent nations nearby. The country, with a population of some 943,000 people, has had a checkered history of diplomatic relations with the West since Mr. Bainimarama ousted the national government in December 2006 in a military coup.</p> <p>Mr. Bainimarama, who has served as prime minister since elections were restored in 2014, is seen as an influential figure in the Pacific as China and Western countries compete on issues vital to the region, including security, climate change and fishing rights.</p> <p>Illustrating that competition, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi concluded a trip to Solomon Islands on Friday with several accords that include enabling closer engagement of diplomats and more cooperation on infrastructure, energy and other industries. Those deals came around a month after China signed a security pact with Solomon Islands, alarming the U.S. and its allies who were concerned the agreement could open the door for a Chinese military presence in the country.</p> <p>Mr. Wang is on a 10-day tour of the region that will include a summit in Fiji with the foreign ministers of many Pacific nations.</p> <p>Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, meantime, was in Fiji on Friday as she sought to assure Pacific island nations of Australia’s close support after a change of government last weekend, which put the center-left Labor Party in power for the first time since 2013. Ms. Wong said she expected to meet with Mr. Bainimarama during her visit.</p> <p>“It’s for Pacific nations to make their own decisions about who they want to partner with and in which areas and we respect that,” Ms. Wong said. “We want to be a partner of choice.”</p>

Pacific nations in the past have been reluctant to pick sides in the great-power competition in the region, underscored by the president of the Federated States of Micronesia writing a May 20 letter cautioning other Pacific nations from signing on to a China-led proposal for deeper security and trade ties in the Pacific.

David Panuelo, Micronesia's president, said in the letter that getting involved in great-power competition between the U.S. and China threatens to take away the focus from addressing climate change, which he described as his country's biggest security risk. He said giving China control over Pacific countries' communications infrastructure, ocean territory and security increases the chances that China will get into a military conflict with the U.S. and its allies if China invades Taiwan, and that Pacific nations would be collateral damage.

However, Fiji signing up to Mr. Biden's new initiative indicates a willingness to be more explicit about which countries are viewed as strong partners, some researchers said.

"It's very significant," said Anna Powles, a senior lecturer in security studies at Massey University in New Zealand who focuses on the Pacific. "This sends a really strong signal by Fiji about where it stands in relation to its allies and partners and China."

The new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework aims to enhance cooperation on global issues such as supply chains, clean energy and digital rules, although it doesn't include plans to negotiate lower tariffs or broad steps to clear away barriers to market access. The White House said nations in the new framework collectively represent about 40% of global gross domestic product.

Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand, another IPEF founding member, said she intends to discuss competition in the Pacific region with Mr. Biden during a meeting scheduled for Tuesday, along with other issues including the war in Ukraine.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Ukraine fighters in east feel abandoned
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/ukraine-frontline-russia-military-severodonetsk/
GIST	<p>DRUZHKIVKA, Ukraine — Stuck in their trenches, the Ukrainian volunteers lived off a potato per day as Russian forces pounded them with artillery and Grad rockets on a key eastern front line. Outnumbered, untrained and clutching only light weapons, the men prayed for the barrage to end — and for their own tanks to stop targeting the Russians.</p> <p>Are you on Telegram? Subscribe to our channel for the latest updates on Russia's war in Ukraine. "They [Russians] already know where we are, and when the Ukrainian tank shoots from our side it gives away our position," said Serhi Lapko, their company commander, recalling the recent battle. "And they start firing back with everything — Grads, mortars.</p> <p>"And you just pray to survive."</p> <p>Ukrainian leaders have projected and nurtured a public image of military invulnerability — of their volunteer and professional forces triumphantly standing up to the Russian onslaught. Videos of assaults on Russian tanks or positions are posted daily on social media. Artists are creating patriotic posters, billboards and T-shirts. The postal service even released stamps commemorating the sinking of a Russian warship in the Black Sea.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces have succeeded in thwarting Russian efforts to seize Kyiv and Kharkiv and have scored battlefield victories in the east. But the experience of Lapko and his group of volunteers offers a rare and more realistic portrait of the conflict and Ukraine's struggle to halt the Russian advance in parts of Donbas. Ukraine, like Russia, has provided scant information about deaths, injuries or losses of military equipment. But after three months of war, this company of 120 men is down to 54 because of deaths, injuries and desertions.</p>

The volunteers were civilians before Russia invaded on Feb. 24, and they never expected to be dispatched to one of the most dangerous front lines in eastern Ukraine. They quickly found themselves in the crosshairs of war, feeling abandoned by their military superiors and struggling to survive.

“Our command takes no responsibility,” Lapko said. “They only take credit for our achievements. They give us no support.”

When they could take it no longer, Lapko and his top lieutenant, Vitaliy Khrus, retreated with members of their company this week to a hotel away from the front. There, both men spoke to The Washington Post on the record, knowing they could face a court-martial and time in military prison.

“If I speak for myself, I’m not a battlefield commander,” he added. “But the guys will stand by me, and I will stand by them till the end.”

The volunteers’ battalion commander, Ihor Kisileichuk, did not respond to calls or written questions from The Post in time for publication, but he sent a terse message late Thursday saying: “Without this commander, the unit protects our land,” in an apparent reference to Lapko. A Ukrainian military spokesman declined immediate comment, saying it would take “days” to provide a response.

“War breaks people down,” said Serhiy Haidai, head of the regional war administration in Luhansk province, acknowledging many volunteers were not properly trained because Ukrainian authorities did not expect Russia to invade. But he maintained that all soldiers are taken care of: “They have enough medical supplies and food. The only thing is there are people that aren’t ready to fight.”

But Lapko and Khrus’s concerns were echoed recently by a platoon of the 115th Brigade 3rd Battalion, based nearby in the besieged city of Severodonetsk. In a video uploaded to Telegram on May 24, and confirmed as authentic by an aide to Haidai, volunteers said they will no longer fight because they lacked proper weapons, rear support and military leadership.

“We are being sent to certain death,” said a volunteer, reading from a prepared script, adding that a similar video was filmed by members of the 115th Brigade 1st Battalion. “We are not alone like this, we are many.”

Ukraine’s military rebutted the volunteers’ claims in their own video posted online, saying the “deserters” had everything they needed to fight: “They thought they came for a vacation,” one service member said. “That’s why they left their positions.”

Hours after The Post interviewed Lapko and Khrus, members of Ukraine’s military security service arrived at their hotel and detained some of their men, accusing them of desertion.

The men contend that they were the ones who were deserted.

Waiting to die

Before the invasion, Lapko was a driller of oil and gas wells. Khrus bought and sold power tools. Both lived in the western city of Uzhhorod and joined the territorial defense forces, a civilian militia that sprung up after the invasion.

Lapko, built like a wrestler, was made a company commander in the 5th Separate Rifle Battalion, in charge of 120 men. The similarly burly Khrus became a platoon commander under Lapko. All of their comrades were from western Ukraine. They were handed AK-47 rifles and given training that lasted less than a half-hour.

“We shot 30 bullets and then they said, ‘You can’t get more; too expensive,’ ” Lapko said.

They were given orders to head to the western city of Lviv. When they got there, they were ordered to go south and then east into Luhansk province in Donbas, portions of which were already under the control of Moscow-backed separatists and are now occupied by Russian forces. A couple dozen of his men refused to fight, Lapko said, and they were imprisoned.

The ones who stayed were based in the town of Lysychansk. From there, they were dispatched to Toshkivka, a front-line village bordering the separatist areas where the Russian forces were trying to advance. They were surprised when they got the orders.

“When we were coming here, we were told that we were going to be in the third line on defense,” Lapko said. “Instead, we came to the zero line, the front line. We didn’t know where we were going.”

The area has become a focal point of the war, as Moscow concentrates its military might on capturing the region. The city of Severodonetsk, near Lysychansk, is surrounded on three sides by Russian forces. Over the weekend, they destroyed one of three bridges into the city, and they are constantly shelling the other two. Ukrainian troops inside Severodonetsk are fighting to prevent the Russians from completely encircling the city.

That’s also the mission of Lapko’s men. If Toshkivka falls, the Russians can advance north toward Lysychansk and completely surround Severodonetsk. That would also allow them to go after larger cities in the region.

When the volunteers first arrived, their rotations in and out of Toshkivka lasted three or four days. As the war intensified, they stayed for a week minimum, sometimes two. “Food gets delivered every day except for when there are shellings or the situation is bad,” Khrus said.

And in recent weeks, he said, the situation has gotten much worse. When their supply chains were cut off for two days by the bombardment, the men were forced to make do with a potato a day.

They spend most days and nights in trenches dug into the forest on the edges of Toshkivka or inside the basements of abandoned houses. “They have no water, nothing there,” Lapko said. “Only water that I bring them every other day.”

It’s a miracle the Russians haven’t pushed through their defensive line in Toshkivka, Khrus said as Lapko nodded. Besides their rifles and hand grenades, the only weapons they were given were a handful of rocket-propelled grenades to counter the well-equipped Russian forces. And no one showed Lapko’s men how to use the RPGs.

“We had no proper training,” Lapko said.

“It’s around four RPGs for 15 men,” Khrus said, shaking his head.

The Russians, he said, are deploying tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, Grad rockets and other forms of artillery — when they try to penetrate the forest with ground troops or infantry vehicles, they can easily get close enough “to kill.”

“The situation is controllable but difficult,” Khrus said. “And when the heavy weapons are against us, we don’t have anything to work with. We are helpless.”

Behind their positions, Ukrainian forces have tanks, artillery and mortars to back Lapko’s men and other units along the front. But when the tanks or mortars are fired, the Russians respond with Grad rockets, often in areas where Lapko’s men are taking cover. In some cases, his troops have found themselves with no artillery support.

This is, in part, because Lapko has not been provided a radio, he said. So there’s no contact with his superiors in Lysychansk, preventing him from calling for help.

The men accuse the Russians of using phosphorous bombs, incendiary weapons that are banned by international law if used against civilians.

“It explodes at 30 to 50 meters high and goes down slowly and burns everything,” Khrus said.

“Do you know what we have against phosphorous?” Lapko asked. “A glass of water, a piece of cloth to cover your mouth with!”

Both Lapko and Khrus expect to die at the front. That is why Lapko carries a pistol.

“It’s just a toy against them, but I have it so that if they take me I will shoot myself,” he said.

Survival

Despite the hardships, his men have fought courageously, Lapko said. Pointing at Khrus, he declared: “This guy here is a legend, a hero.” Khrus and his platoon, his commander said, have killed more than 50 Russian soldiers in close-up battles.

In a recent clash, he said, his men attacked two Russian armored vehicles carrying about 30 soldiers, ambushing them with grenades and guns.

“Their mistake was not to come behind us,” Lapko said. “If they would have done that, I wouldn’t be talking to you here now.”

Lapko has recommended 12 of his men for medals of valor, including two posthumously.

The war has taken a heavy toll on his company — as well as on other Ukrainian forces in the area. Two of his men were killed, among 20 fatalities in the battalion as a whole, and “many are wounded and in recovery now,” he said.

Then there are those who are traumatized and have not returned.

“Many got shell shock. I don’t know how to count them,” Lapko said.

The casualties here are largely kept secret to protect morale among troops and the general public.

“On Ukrainian TV we see that there are no losses,” Lapko said. “There’s no truth.”

Most deaths, he added, were because injured soldiers were not evacuated quickly enough, often waiting as long as 12 hours for transport to a military hospital in Lysychansk, 15 miles away. Sometimes, the men have to carry an injured soldier on a stretcher as far as two miles on foot to find a vehicle, Lapko said. Two vehicles assigned to his company never arrived, he said, and are being used instead by people at military headquarters.

“If I had a car and was told that my comrade is wounded somewhere, I’d come anytime and get him,” said Lapko, who used his own beat-up car to travel from Lysychansk to the hotel. “But I don’t have the necessary transport to get there.”

Retreat

Lapko and his men have grown increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with their superiors. His request for the awards has not been approved. His battalion commander demanded that he send 20 of his soldiers to another front line, which meant that he couldn’t rotate his men out from Toshkivka. He refused the order.

	<p>The final affront arrived last week when he arrived at military headquarters in Lysychansk after two weeks in Toshkivka. His battalion commander and team had moved to another town without informing him, he said, taking food, water and other supplies.</p> <p>“They left us with no explanation,” Lapko said. “I think we were sent here to close a gap and no one cares if we live or die.”</p> <p>So he, Khrus and several members of their company drove the 60 miles to Druzhkivka to stay in a hotel for a few days. “My guys wanted to wash themselves for the first time in a month,” Lapko said. “You know, hygiene! We don’t have it. We sleep in basements, on mattresses with rats running around.”</p> <p>He and his men insisted that they want to return to the front.</p> <p>“We’re ready to fight and we will keep on fighting,” Lapko said. “We will protect every meter of our country — but with adequate commandments and without unrealistic orders. I took an oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people. We’re protecting Ukraine and we won’t let anyone in as long as we’re alive.”</p> <p>But on Monday, Ukraine’s military security services arrived at the hotel and took Khrus and other members of his platoon to a detention center for two days, accusing them of desertion. Lapko was stripped of his command, according to an order reviewed by The Post. He is being held at the base in Lysychansk, his future uncertain.</p> <p>Reached by phone Wednesday, he said two more of his men had been wounded on the front line.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Holiday travel amid record-high gas prices
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/05/26/memorial-day-travel-gas-prices/
GIST	<p>More Americans are expected to travel for the Memorial Day weekend than last year despite record-high gasoline prices, costlier fares, higher hotel rates and a wave of covid infections — the result of pent-up demand outstripping health concerns and escalating prices, industry experts say.</p> <p>Surveys show that gas prices averaging up to \$6 per gallon in some parts of the country and \$4.60 nationwide — a 50 percent jump from a year ago — have caused some travelers to stick closer to home. However, many will seek less expensive hotels or cut back on entertainment and eating out to afford a getaway, experts say.</p> <p>“For these two years, we’ve missed family gatherings, weddings, bar mitzvahs, graduations — all these things with friends and family,” said Amir Eylon, president of Longwoods International, a travel and tourism market research consulting firm. “Now that the fear of covid among travelers has significantly subsided — and despite inflationary pressures — folks are determined to get out there.”</p> <p>Nationwide, AAA predicts 39.2 million people — 8 percent more than last year and 92 percent of pre-pandemic levels — will travel over the Memorial Day weekend, the unofficial start of what it expects to be a busy summer. Compared with last year’s holiday weekend, AAA expects a 4.6 percent increase in car travel, 25 percent growth in airplane trips and a 200 percent jump in travel by bus, train and cruise ship.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the average ticket price for the lowest airfare is \$184, up 6 percent compared to a year ago. Midrange hotels are charging an average \$230 per night — 42 percent more — for their lowest rate, according to AAA. Only daily rental car prices are down, falling 16 percent from last year, when vehicles were scarce.</p> <p>D.C. residents are paying higher gas costs than the national average — \$4.84 per gallon — but are still expected to jam Washington-area roads.</p>

Maryland officials advise hitting the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to Eastern Shore beaches in the early morning or late evening. The Maryland Transportation Authority expects more than 330,000 vehicles to cross the bridge over the long weekend, about the same as pre-pandemic Memorial Day weekends.

An ominous sign: Last weekend, days before the holiday, Sunday's westbound backups reached 5.5 miles, the authority said.

Last year's Memorial Day weekend marked the first major travel period after the distribution of coronavirus vaccines, but they were limited. This year, vaccines are widely available. Moreover, travel industry experts say, some people who put off traveling have more savings to put toward higher costs. Some also booked plane tickets and hotel rooms months ago, before prices surged.

An April survey by AAA found that more than 50 percent of D.C. residents said they planned to travel more this summer than last year, despite rising gas prices. More than half said they were less worried about the pandemic, and about 1 in 3 said it would be their first significant summer trip since 2019. Though most said they didn't consider the price of gas when making plans, about 1 in 4 said they were taking fewer or shorter trips because of it, AAA said.

"I think this year, especially with vaccines being readily available and many people being vaccinated, many people have a desire to travel," said Ragina Ali, spokeswoman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. "Overwhelming, pent-up demand for people to resume some kind of normalcy seems to be outweighing the costs."

Some motorists who headed out Thursday winced at the cost of filling up. However, none mentioned concerns about the pandemic or considerations to cancel plans because of gas costs. Traveling, many said, felt like something they needed to do, despite the added expense.

At a Shell station in Stevensville, Md., where regular gas was \$4.49 a gallon, Amalya Dixon bristled at the \$50 to fill up, even with her tank starting at a quarter full. Dixon, 61, said she and her daughter, Lina Flefel, 26, were driving to Chincoteague Island, Va., where Dixon was moving from Silver Spring. The moving van wasn't far behind.

"I had to move," Dixon, an artist, said of her trip. "But I'm constantly looking at gas prices, trying to find the cheapest one. ... One of the things I'm looking forward to on Chincoteague is riding my bike everywhere."

Dixon said she also planned to drive to a family wedding in Maine in late July, but she'll probably cut back on eating out and other niceties to save up.

"I have to go," she said. "It will affect how I spend my money in other ways. I can't spend money on other things if I have to use it on gas."

Several recent surveys, including by travel consultants and industry groups, show that concerns about gas prices have surpassed those about the coronavirus.

In a recent Washington Post-Schar School poll, 72 percent of Americans said they "definitely" or "probably" plan to take a vacation this summer. About 6 in 10 said gas prices were a "major factor" in their plans, while about 1 in 4 cited concerns about the coronavirus, according to the poll taken in late April and early May.

In Maryland, an automatic increase in the gas tax will send prices even higher starting July 1, adding 6.6 cents per gallon. The tax, which is tied to inflation and collected at the wholesale level, will increase from 36.1 cents per gallon to 42.7 cents.

Democrats who lead the state's General Assembly did not support a special session to stave off the increase or offer another temporary gas tax holiday, saying such efforts offer marginal relief for motorists while starving the state of money needed for roads, transit and bridges.

In Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin's (R) plans to suspend a scheduled increase in the 26.2 cents-per-gallon gas tax and to suspend the tax altogether for three months have stalled in protracted budget negotiations between the Republican-led House and the Democratic-controlled Senate. The General Assembly returns to Richmond on Wednesday to vote on a compromise budget bill — too late for Memorial Day motorists.

The cost of filling up is playing into tourism pitches.

Jessica Waters, a spokeswoman for Ocean City, touted the Maryland beach town's proximity — “less than a tank away” — from millions of residents in D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia.

“Gas prices are higher, but a trip to Ocean City is still much cheaper than traveling to most other beach destinations,” Waters said. “It's certainly cheaper than airfare.”

Even so, airlines say they are expecting big crowds. Bookings are up 3 percent compared with the same period in May 2019, but air travelers are spending 24 percent more, according to data collected by Adobe Analytics that is used by companies in the travel industry.

United Airlines said this Memorial Day weekend will be one of its busiest this year. The carrier said it expected 2.6 million people to fly between Thursday and Tuesday — a 50 percent increase over last year and roughly 90 percent of the number who flew during the Memorial Day travel period in 2019.

Delta Air Lines said it will carry roughly 2.5 million customers over the weekend, a 25 percent increase. Even so, the carrier on Thursday announced reductions to its summer schedule, saying it would cut roughly 100 flights per day between July 1 and Aug. 7.

United, Delta and several other U.S. carriers are still grappling with staffing shortages as they scramble to replace the estimated 50,000 workers who left the industry during the pandemic. As a result, despite greater demand, many carriers are flying pared-down schedules as they try to avoid the kind of delays and cancellations that upended the plans of tens and thousands of travelers last summer and fall.

Those dynamics — fewer flights combined with higher demand — are pushing up ticket prices, putting flights out of reach for some.

Los Angeles resident Ellie Romero, 25, who works in communications, said she had been saving for a trip to Atlanta this summer to visit family she hasn't seen since the pandemic started. When she checked in March, round trip airfare cost about \$300. By the time she was ready to buy a ticket in late April, she said, she was stunned to discover the lowest fare had nearly tripled.

“I saw that and thought, ‘No way that's happening,’ ” Romero said.

Travel experts say history shows that gas price spikes, such as during the Great Recession and after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, often shorten — but don't stop — the great American road trip.

In a recent study, Eylon's firm found that almost 60 percent of those surveyed said rising gas prices would “impact” or “greatly impact” their travel plans in the next six months, including by taking fewer or shorter trips. Only 6 percent said they were canceling travel plans — slightly above the 5 percent cancellation rate typical for family emergencies, work demands and other problems, he said.

“They're going to keep traveling,” he said. “They're just going to find ways to reduce their spending to reallocate their travel budget.”

	<p>Larry Roessner, 70, of Myrtle Beach, S.C., laughed in apparent disbelief when asked how much it cost to fill his RV as he and his wife, Darleen, 66, headed to the Atlantic City area. He paid \$159 at the Shell station in Stevensville on Thursday, even though he started with the tank partially full.</p> <p>Roessner estimated gas for the two-day drive would total \$600 to \$700 — far more than last year but probably less than he might lose at a craps table in Atlantic City.</p> <p>“I’m retired,” Roessner said. “What else am I going to do? ... We’re going to go have fun and not worry about it.”</p> <p>But others said inflation has put a summer trip off limits.</p> <p>Meggan Wagner, 40, who is unemployed, said she usually travels several times every summer from her home in southern Iowa to Wisconsin. But this year, she said, she’ll pass on the nine-hour drive.</p> <p>“Not only are the gas prices going up, food is going up, too, which makes it twice as bad,” Wagner said. “You either choose to go somewhere or you choose to eat, and this year I’m kind of cutting back.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Lebanon spy chief: US seeks help
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/abbas-ibrahim-austin-tice-syria-assad/
GIST	<p>BEIRUT — Lebanon’s intelligence chief said Thursday that he met with Biden administration officials this week to discuss ways he could help secure the release of six Americans who are being held prisoner or are missing in Syria, including Austin Tice, a freelance journalist who contributed to The Washington Post.</p> <p>Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, the head of the Lebanese General Security Directorate, said in an interview that he received an invitation to the White House earlier this month to discuss the missing Americans. The invitation came a few days after President Biden met with Tice’s parents.</p> <p>Ibrahim, who has helped to secure the release of several hostages in the Middle East over the past decade, has for years been involved in the effort to locate Tice, who disappeared in Syria in 2012, as well as other missing Americans. “They wanted me to resume my effort to solve this problem,” he said, referring to his meetings this week with White House officials. “They wanted their people back, and this is their goal.”</p> <p>State Department spokesman Ned Price on Wednesday confirmed that Ibrahim met with Roger Carstens, the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs. “We are not going to comment on the specifics of those discussions beyond restating the fact that we have no higher priority than seeing the safe release of Americans who are wrongfully detained or held hostage anywhere around the world,” Price said during a news briefing.</p> <p>“Of course, we talked about the case of Austin Tice yesterday, an American who has been — who has been separated from his family for nearly 10 years, who has spent a quarter of his life separated from his family,” Price said. “He is always top of mind. The other Americans who are detained in places like Iran and Russia and Afghanistan and Venezuela and elsewhere are always top of mind for us too.”</p> <p>Tice disappeared when he attempted to leave the rebel-held town of Darayya, outside the Syrian capital, Damascus. Darayya was surrounded by government troops at the time. His family members have repeatedly said they are confident that he is alive. Syria has not publicly acknowledged holding Tice or the other Americans, including Majd Kamalmaz, a psychotherapist who went missing in 2017, and four other U.S. citizens whose families do not want publicity.</p> <p>Biden met with Tice’s parents, Marc and Debra Tice, on May 2, and “reiterated his commitment to continue to work through all available avenues to secure Austin’s long overdue return to his family,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement at the time.</p>

Ibrahim, who also met with Debra Tice this week, said it had been a “long time” since any credible information had emerged about Austin Tice’s fate.

“I want to tell everyone that she will not give up at all,” he said of Tice’s mother. “I am beside her with that. We want to close this file. Everyone is eager to do so.”

This week marked the second time in less than two years that Ibrahim has been summoned by the White House to assist in locating missing Americans. His previous trip, in October 2020, was aimed at furthering negotiations with the Syrian government that President Donald Trump launched to help secure the release of the Americans.

Earlier that year, two senior U.S. officials, including Carstens, visited Damascus for secret talks with the head of Syria’s intelligence agency about the fate of Tice, in the first official talks between the two countries since 2012.

At the time of Ibrahim’s 2020 visit, there were disputes within the Trump administration over how far it should go in dealing with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Another subject of discord involved the administration’s dealings with Ibrahim, whose position puts him in frequent contact with Hezbollah, a party in the Lebanese government that is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States.

Ibrahim dismissed those concerns as political issues that should not impede his work. “We are talking about a humanitarian case,” he said Thursday.

Ibrahim helped secure the release of U.S. traveler Sam Goodwin, who was detained at a Syrian government checkpoint in 2019, and a Canadian citizen, Kristian Baxter, who had crossed illegally into Syria from Lebanon. In 2014, Ibrahim oversaw the release of a group of nuns kidnapped by the Nusra Front, a group linked to al-Qaeda.

Ibrahim did not say with whom he would meet in the Syrian government, adding that it was better if his efforts remained in the “shadow.” “When it’s under a spotlight, I believe things will be spoiled,” he said.

In the past, Syria had insisted on a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country and the lifting of U.S. sanctions as a condition for any further discussions about the missing Americans, people familiar with the negotiations said.

“I am not sure what the Syrians want now,” Ibrahim said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 WHO members condemn Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/ukraine-russia-world-health-assembly-who/
GIST	<p>The World Health Assembly on Thursday voted in favor of a resolution that condemned Russian attacks on the health-care system in Ukraine before rejecting a parallel proposal presented by Moscow that Kyiv’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva had called a “subterfuge” that presented a “twisted alternative reality” of the conflict.</p> <p>Ukraine’s successful resolution, which was backed by member states 88-to-12 with 53 abstentions, raises the possibility that Russia could be suspended from the assembly if attacks on hospitals and clinics continue. The assembly is the decision-making body of the World Health Organization, a United Nations global health agency with a sprawling mandate.</p> <p>A counterproposal put forward by Russia and Syria, which suggested that Kyiv bears the blame for some civilian deaths, was also rejected on Thursday, 15-to-66 with 70 abstentions. Ukrainian diplomats have accused Russia of copying the language that condemned an “ongoing health emergency in and around Ukraine” while stripping any language that said Russia was to blame.</p>

Russian diplomats speaking at the assembly accused Ukraine of trying to use a traditionally apolitical forum to settle scores. Vasily Nebenzya, permanent representative of Russia to the United Nations, told the assembly that it was unacceptable to use the WHO to “stigmatize one country.”

Kyiv and its allies argued that the assembly was the place to discuss the health-care impact of the conflict, pointing not only to reports of Russian strikes on medical facilities but also to the risk of famine around the world due to the allegedly deliberate blocking of Ukrainian ports.

“War is a health issue,” Simon Manley, Britain’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva, said. “Health for peace. Peace for health. The World Health Assembly must not be afraid to address health crises, including the cause and, in this case, the aggressor.”

The dueling votes at the annual assembly in Geneva were the latest blow to Russia’s standing in international organizations since it invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Two U.N. General Assembly resolutions passed in March censured Russia for its aggression, and the country was suspended from the U.N. Human Rights Council on April 7.

A separate vote of European WHO member states [at a regional meeting on May 10](#) had pushed the U.N. agency to take a harder stance on Russia during the war and called on WHO officials to consider closing an office in Moscow.

The conflict has taken a huge toll on Ukraine’s health-care sector. In a report released by the WHO on Thursday, the organization said it had recorded 256 attacks on health facilities and personnel during the war, resulting in 59 reported injuries and 75 reported deaths. In total, 3,998 civilian deaths had been recorded since the invasion began.

Ukraine’s successful vote at the World Health Assembly, the top global health event of the year, may not carry with it immediate repercussions for Russia. However, it pointed to references in the WHO constitution that allowed the stripping of voting rights and other rights and benefits.

It was another reminder of how isolated Moscow is on the world stage and offered its many critics a chance to condemn the impact the war was having inside and outside Ukraine. Ukraine’s draft resolution had been co-sponsored by more than 40 other countries, including the United States and all European Union nations except Hungary.

“The devastating military actions undermine the efforts to ensure health and well-being for everybody [and] undermine the mission of WHO,” Polish Health Minister Adam Niedzielski told the assembly. “I believe the organization cannot remain silent in these cases.”

Yevheniia Filipenko, permanent representative of Ukraine to the U.N. in Geneva, said that “in voting down Russia’s draft the World Health Assembly confirmed that the responsibility for the health crisis in Ukraine rests exclusively with the Russian Federation.”

But some nations, without supporting Russia, expressed concern about condemning a single nation at the assembly. The number of abstentions in both votes was relatively high.

The suspension of a member’s voting rights would be extremely unusual, though not unprecedented: The [WHO stripped South Africa of its voting rights in 1964](#) after it codified its apartheid policy of racial segregation. It did not return the rights until after apartheid ended 30 years later.

Earlier this month, Russia’s State Duma, the lower house of parliament, said it was considering a Russian withdrawal from both the WHO and the World Trade Organization. Pyotr Tolstoy, the deputy chairman of the State Duma, [said the two organizations](#) had “neglected all obligations in relation to our country.”

HEADLINE	05/26 Ukraine fighters take to electric bikes
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/ukraine-russia-war-electric-bikes-weapons/
GIST	<p>During World War II, motorcycles were widely used by militaries to conduct reconnaissance missions. Japanese forces took to pedal-powered bicycles during the conflict's Malayan campaign, using them to outmaneuver British troops moving more slowly on foot — in what became known as the “Bicycle Blitzkrieg.”</p> <p>Now, Ukrainian fighters are using electric bikes in the battle against Russia, mostly in support of reconnaissance missions, demining operations and medical deliveries, according to one of the Ukrainian e-bike makers involved. They've reportedly also been used for carrying out sniper attacks. The bikes have a top speed of 55 miles per hour and are relatively silent — helping their riders evade Russian fire.</p> <p>Ukrainian e-bike firm Eleek initially gave a few bikes to the military when the war began, according to manager Roman Kulchytskyi. Soon after, they began to mass-produce bikes — kitted out in military green, with a small Ukrainian flag on the rear wheel — for Ukraine's fighters.</p> <p>“When the war started, we were shocked at first. ... Everyone was worried and thought about what to do,” Kulchytskyi told The Washington Post. “But we all rallied.”</p> <p>Working from a bomb shelter, Eleek began making a power bank based on lithium-ion battery cells it had left in stock. After struggling for parts, it turned to electronic cigarettes — launching a social media campaign to get people to send in their devices.</p> <p>The military version of the bike was stripped down to remove parts such as mirrors and rotating lights that were considered unnecessary for trail riding. The company added footrests for passengers, improved the charging time, installed a battery control system and included a 220V output that allows soldiers to charge gadgets and can help power Starlink satellite Internet terminals, Kulchytskyi said.</p> <p>The bikes, which are fitted with relatively fat tires, are particularly useful in forested areas where riders can carve their own paths along unsealed trails. They weigh about 140 pounds — light compared with motorbikes — but can carry relatively heavy loads. One video posted on social media showed an armed Ukrainian fighter zipping along a road on an e-bike, apparently traveling as fast as an accompanying vehicle.</p> <p>Another advantage of the bikes is that they may not be visible on thermal imaging systems, which are used to detect differences in temperature and help militaries pinpoint potential targets. That's because the electric motor doesn't heat up like an internal combustion engine, Kulchytskyi said.</p> <p>Daniel Tonkopi, founder of e-bike company Delfast, wrote on Facebook this month that his California-based firm has been donating electric bikes to the Ukrainian army since the war broke out.</p> <p>He included pictures of the bikes carrying antitank weapons and said he had received feedback from the military that they planned to use the bikes to target Russian armored vehicles. During one recent mission, they recounted to him that several vehicles came back with holes but that the riders were intact.</p> <p>Ukraine's armed forces didn't respond to a request for comment on the program.</p> <p>A Delfast spokeswoman said the “primary purpose” of the company's e-bikes is to reduce a user's carbon footprint and make transportation more sustainable. She said Delfast hasn't sold bikes or made modifications to the e-bikes to support any military action. The company is donating 5 percent of all sales to fund humanitarian efforts in Ukraine.</p> <p>Ukraine isn't the only military to try out e-bikes. New Zealand's Air Force is testing locally made UBCO bikes for tasks such as reconnaissance and surveillance. Flight Sgt. Jim Reilly told an air force publication that the bikes made it much easier to carry out patrols. Their relative silence also provides</p>

	<p>service members with “great situational awareness” compared with noisy motorcycles or 4x4 vehicles, he said.</p> <p>Australia’s military is funding e-bike trials for a range of potential combat roles. A recent military video showed troops from a mounted infantry unit known as the Light Horse Regiment winding through gum trees on the bikes.</p> <p>In Norway, e-bikes were tested by border guards patrolling the country’s boundary with Russia. That project is on hold for now, said Rolf K. Ytterstad, a spokesman for the Norwegian army, because of problems with maintenance and the overall economics of the project. “We had good experiences with the e-bikes,” he said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Outrage as NRA to gather in Houston
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/26/nra-meeting-houston-days-after-texas-mass-shooting
GIST	<p>Just days after the deadliest mass school shooting in Texas history, the National Rifle Association (NRA) – America’s leading gun lobbyist group – will meet a few hours away in Houston on Friday.</p> <p>Ashton P Woods says they are not welcome in his home town.</p> <p>“These people are coming into our community. The city of Houston needs to kick them out,” said Woods, an activist and founder of Black Lives Matter Houston. “We have to be just as tough about these things as they are.”</p> <p>Woods is helping organize one of several protests planned just outside the George R Brown Convention Center, where NRA members will browse through exhibits of firearms and gun paraphernalia and hear speeches from key Republican leaders.</p> <p>The goal of the Black Lives Matter protest, Woods said, is to “get loud” outside while powerful speakers – including the Texas governor, Greg Abbott, Texas senator Ted Cruz and former US president Donald Trump – take the podium inside. Woods said the issue of firearms was particularly important to the civil rights group that primarily tackles issues of police brutality in America.</p> <p>“Whether it be death by suicide, death by cop, death by mass shooter, we need to control the access people have to deadly weapons,” Woods said. “These things are interconnected.”</p> <p>The NRA is a powerful lobbying organization in American politics, spending nearly \$5m in 2021 to pressure lawmakers to oppose measures like universal background checks for gun sales and bans on powerful assault weapons.</p> <p>About 55,000 NRA members are expected to attend the event in Houston. The annual meeting is often a draw for activists and counter-protests as members inside discuss firearms policy – often the need for expanding access to guns.</p> <p>Outside the convention center, multiple counter-demonstrations are expected in Houston – especially in light of a mass shooting that killed 19 children and two adults at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>Houston police are also expecting crowds at the convention center. Jodi Silva, a police spokeswoman, said the department does not share details of its policing strategies, but that there would be a visible presence of officers.</p> <p>“We always are aware of the demonstrations and/or counter-demonstrations and staff accordingly,” Silva said. “We staff accordingly to make sure that everyone can participate and be safe.”</p>

	<p>Megan Hansen and the Rev Teresa Kim Pecinovsky watched the news updates from Uvalde on Tuesday in shock. When they found out the NRA would be in Houston Friday, they decided they also needed to take action.</p> <p>“We live in a state full of people who love their guns more than they love the lives of the children in their community,” Pecinovsky said. “I had to do something with that amount of rage and lament.”</p> <p>Hansen and Pecinovsky have organized an interfaith gathering that will include a silent march and a moment of reflection when organizers will read the names of those who died in Uvalde.</p> <p>While Texas’s politics are staunchly conservative, the Houston area has become a bastion of progressivism. Harris county, which includes Houston, voted for Joe Biden by 56% in 2020. Hansen said she wants others to know that the NRA’s message does not reflect that community.</p> <p>“Houston is the most diverse city in the United States and we have people from all over the world who do not agree with the rhetoric of the NRA,” Hansen said. “We want to just say, remember the people who we lost and how can we take this feeling and turn it into action?”</p> <p>That action – specifically legislative measures to restrict access to high-powered firearms – is unlikely to come from Republican lawmakers in the state. Yet activists in Houston want the shooting in Uvalde and protests this weekend to spark more pressure on political leaders to prevent the next tragedy.</p> <p>“I’m hopeful this will not just be something people attend and then leave,” Pecinovsky said. “It needs to be a catalyst for real and tangible change.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Texas police scrutinized in response
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/26/uvalde-texas-school-shooting-police-hesitated
GIST	<p>Texas law enforcement agencies are facing escalating criticism over their response to the mass shooting at Robb elementary school in Uvalde, after it emerged that the gunman remained locked inside a classroom for up to an hour while large numbers of police officers were amassed outside the room without taking any action.</p> <p>At a press conference on Thursday afternoon, Texas authorities confirmed that the shooter had been locked inside a classroom for an hour before he was confronted and killed. He committed all his 21 murders inside that room – including 19 children and two teachers.</p> <p>“Numerous” police officers had assembled just outside the room, the authorities admitted, but did not make any attempt to break through the door during that hour. Instead, they decided to pull back and wait until a specialist tactical unit arrived, while evacuating other children and staff from the building.</p> <p>Victor Escalon, the south Texas regional director of the state’s department of public safety, told the press conference that armed officers arrived at Robb elementary about four minutes after the shooter entered through an unlocked side door at about 11.40am on Tuesday. Yet it was “approximately an hour later” that a tactical team of US Border Patrol arrived at the school, burst into the classroom and killed the gunman.</p> <p>Asked whether the police officers could have broken into the classroom earlier than an hour into the massacre, Escalon replied: “There are a lot of possibilities. There were numerous officers at that classroom. Once we interview all those officers we’ll have a better idea.”</p> <p>Escalon appeared to admit that mistakes might have been made when he alluded to the small-town nature of Uvalde, a community of about 20,000 residents close to the Mexican border. “Could anyone have gone [into the classroom] sooner? You have to understand, this is a small town,” he said.</p>

The law enforcement chief's account of the timeline of the massacre came as the police faced growing pressure to explain how such a devastating gun rampage could have been allowed to unfold over such an exceptional length of time. Hours earlier, it emerged that parents of children trapped inside the school during the rampage had pleaded with officers to do more to stop the carnage even as it was happening.

The Associated Press reported that as the massacre was unfolding, several parents and other local people expressed distress at the apparent hesitation of law enforcement to storm the school. Juan Carranza, who lives beside the school, told the news agency he witnessed women shouting at officers: "Go in there! Go in there!"

Javier Cazares, whose 10-year-old daughter Jacklyn was killed, told AP that police appeared unprepared.

"More could have been done," he said.

He said he and other residents gathered outside the school started to plan their own rescue mission as the gunman remained locked inside.

"Let's just rush in because the cops aren't doing anything like they are supposed to," he said.

A video recorded by residents and posted on social media captured in real time the anger of parents at the spectacle of armed police standing outside the school and not going in. "They are all fucking parking outside, man – they need to go in there, they are all in there. The cops aren't doing shit but standing outside," shouted one father.

A distressed mother yelled: "I'm going to go. All these kids are in the school and they are just standing there. Our kids are there, my son is right there."

As tension mounted, a police officer is filmed trying to push parents back from the side of the school. "You know that there are kids, right? There are little kids. They don't know how to defend themselves from the shooter," the father said.

One mother who spoke to the Wall Street Journal said officers put her in handcuffs for "interfering in an active investigation" when she urged them to enter the school. "The police were doing nothing," Angeli Rose Gomez told the Journal. Authorities have disputed her account.

Jose Cazares, whose niece Jackie died in the shooting, said her family wants answers about how police responded that day: "It took them 45 minutes to do what? Nothing."

His brother, Jackie's father, came to the school Tuesday afternoon as the shooting unfolded and begged officers to go in. "My brother said 'let me go in there .. my baby is in there. I'm not going anywhere until I see my baby.'"

Cazares added: "I heard the governor say that he advocated half a billion dollars for school safety. Why wasn't that school safe?"

"They need to be held accountable, the school, the PD, the governor."

It is not clear whether more prompt police action to break into the classroom and take out the shooter could have saved any of the 21 lives lost. Escalon told the press conference that most of the killing appeared to have occurred early on.

"The majority of the gunfire was in the beginning. Numerous, I'd say more than 25," he said.

Further agonising details of the shooting emerged on Thursday. A 10-year-old boy in the next classroom described how he crouched with a friend under a desk. The boy said at one point the shooter entered his classroom and threatened him.

The aunt of an 11-year-old who survived the shooting said her niece used the blood of fellow students to play dead when the gunman entered her classroom.

“[She] got some blood and put it on herself so she could pretend she was dead,” Blanca Rivera told NBC 5 Dallas Fort Worth.

And in another tragic development, the husband of Irma Garcia, one of the teachers who was shot and killed while sheltering children, died of a heart attack on Thursday.

The Garcias had been together for more than 30 years and were high school sweethearts before marrying and having four children, according to Debra Austin, a cousin of his wife.

“I truly believe Joe died of a broken heart and losing the love of his life ... was too much to bear,” Austin wrote on a GoFundMe page.

Uvalde was the 213th mass shooting in the US this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, an independent database. It defines a mass shooting as an incident in which four or more people are injured or killed.

Robb elementary was the 27th US school to have experienced a shooting this year, Education Week reported.

The horror of so many children dying in a classroom has prompted renewed soul-searching at all levels of American public life. Joe Biden attempted on Wednesday to counter resistance from Republicans in Congress to basic gun regulations by saying that “the second amendment is not absolute”.

Chris Murphy, the Democratic senator from Connecticut, which saw the devastating Sandy Hook school shooting almost a decade ago in which 20 young children were killed, is leading attempts to enlist Republican support for gun control reform. He is known to have spoken with two Republican senators – Susan Collins from Maine and Pat Toomey from Pennsylvania.

The talks are focusing on FBI background checks for all firearms sales and a so-called “red flag law” to confiscate guns from individuals who might harm themselves or others.

At a rally in Washington held by Everytown For Gun Safety on Thursday, Murphy said he was engaged in bipartisan conversations to try to make the streets and schools safer. “I hope we will find that common ground, we are going to work our tails off to achieve that compromise,” he said.

The gun debate has been most intense in Texas as the state deals with yet another mass shooting. Some of the deadliest events in recent times have taken place in Texas, including the 2017 attack on a Baptist church in Sutherland Springs that killed 25 and the 2019 rampage in a Walmart in El Paso that left 23 dead.

The Republican-controlled state legislature continues to loosen already minimal gun regulations, in the name of what political leaders call second amendment “freedoms”. A year ago the Republican governor, Greg Abbott, signed a new provision that allows Texans to carry handguns in public without a license or training.

Abbott was confronted on Wednesday as he held a press conference over the Uvalde shooting by Beto O’Rourke, the Democrat running against him in November.

“This is on you until you choose to do something different,” O’Rourke interjected from the audience. “This will continue to happen, somebody needs to stand up for the children of this state or they will continue to be killed.”

	<p>O'Rourke was escorted out of the room as the Republican mayor of Uvalde, Don McLaughlin, called him a "sick son of a bitch".</p> <p>Ted Cruz, the Republican senator for Texas, was confronted by some hard facts by Sky News and ended up walking away from the camera complaining about "propaganda". Asked for his response to the massacre, Cruz played an emotive card, saying in a shaking voice: "There are 19 sets of parents who are never going to get to kiss their child goodnight again."</p> <p>Pressed by the Sky News reporter on why the epidemic of mass shootings happens only in America, Cruz walked away from the interview, saying: "Stop being a propagandist."</p> <p>The ratio of firearms to population in the US far outstrips any other country in the world and is more than double the rate of the second country, Yemen, which is undergoing a brutal civil war. The US also has a dramatically higher rate of gun deaths than any other high-income country.</p> <p>Further heated confrontations are expected on Friday when the National Rifle Association, the lobby group that has been the most vociferous opponent of gun safety laws, holds its annual meeting in Houston. Abbott will be among the speakers. So will Donald Trump. Attendees at Trump's speech, however, will be banned from carrying guns.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Japan to reopen to foreign tourists
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/27/japan-to-reopen-to-foreign-tourists-after-two-year-pandemic-closure
GIST	<p>Japan has announced it will end a two-year pandemic closure and reopen to tourists from 98 countries and regions next month, but travellers will only be allowed in as part of tour groups.</p> <p>The decision comes after the government last week said it would test allowing small group tours with visitors from the US, Australia, Thailand and Singapore from this month.</p> <p>On Thursday, the government revised border controls to resume accepting package tours from the 98 countries and regions – including Britain, the US, France, Spain, Canada and Malaysia – starting on 10 June.</p> <p>Japan will also expand the number of airports that accept international flights to seven, adding Naha in its southern Okinawa prefecture and New Chitose near Sapporo in northern Hokkaido.</p> <p>For most of the pandemic Japan has barred all tourists and allowed only citizens and foreign residents entry, though even the latter have periodically been shut out.</p> <p>All arrivals have to test negative to Covid before travel to Japan and many must be tested again on arrival, though triple-vaccinated people coming from certain countries can skip the additional test as well as a three-day quarantine required for others.</p> <p>Tour groups are expected to take responsibility for ensuring visitors respect Japan's near-universal mask-wearing and other measures that have helped keep the toll from Covid comparatively low.</p> <p>Just how many people will be able to take advantage of the careful reopening is unclear as Japan is planning to double a daily entry cap, but only to 20,000.</p> <p>The prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has said he wants to ease border control measures, but moves are expected to proceed slowly, with strong public support for the current restrictions.</p> <p>Japan welcomed a record 31.9 million foreign visitors in 2019 and had been on track to achieve its goal of 40 million in 2020 before the pandemic hit.</p>

HEADLINE	05/26 Toronto police kill man w/rifle near school
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/toronto-police-man-rifle-elementary-school
GIST	<p>Police in Toronto have shot and killed a man after he was spotted carrying a rifle near an elementary school, prompting an emergency lockdown for hundreds of students.</p> <p>Officers responded to reports of a man, described as being in his late teens or early 20s, carrying a firearm in Scarborough's Port Union area of the Canadian city about 1pm.</p> <p>Witnesses told local media they heard three gunshots and then saw police attempting to revive the man.</p> <p>The police chief, James Ramer, told reporters Thursday afternoon that the event was "isolated" and there was no further threat to public safety, but that police would increase patrols in the area.</p> <p>"Due to the proximity to a school, I certainly understand the trauma and how traumatic this must have been for staff, students and parents, given the recent events that have happened in the United States," he said.</p> <p>The scare comes as the US reckons with its worst school shooting in a decade. Two days ago, 19 children and two teachers were killed when an 18-year-old gunman entered an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>Ramer said he was unable to comment further on the incident because the province's Special Investigations Unit will conduct an investigation.</p> <p>The police watchdog intervenes whenever an officer fires at or kills a civilian.</p> <p>The Toronto district school board said two schools – Charlottetown Junior public school and Centennial Road Junior public school – went into "hold and secure" mode. Two other schools – Joseph Howe Senior public school and Sir Oliver Mowat Collegiate Institute – went into lockdown.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the school board said it didn't appear a nearby school was linked to the incident.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/27 Day 93 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/27/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-93-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kharkiv has been hit by fresh strikes amid fears the city is still on Russia's agenda. At least nine civilians were killed, including a child, and 19 injured, authorities said. "Today, the occupiers shelled Kharkiv again. At the moment, the list of the dead includes nine people. 19 wounded. All civilians," Zelenskiy said. Residents have been urged to go to, or remain in, shelters.• Officials in Ukraine have admitted that Russia has the "upper hand" in fighting in the country's east. The governor of the Luhansk region, Serhiy Haidai, said just 5% of the area now remained in Ukrainian hands – down from about 10% little more than a week ago – and that Ukrainian forces were retreating in some areas. "The Russian army has thrown all its forces at taking the Luhansk region," he said in a video on Telegram. "Extremely fierce fighting is taking place on the outskirts of Sievierodonetsk. They are simply destroying the city, they are shelling it every day, shelling without pause."• The Kremlin has rejected claims that Russia has blocked grain exports from Ukraine, blaming the west for creating such a situation by imposing sanctions on Russia. The UK's foreign minister, Liz Truss, accused Vladimir Putin of "weaponising" hunger through Russia's blockade of Ukrainian grain exports. A senior Turkish official said Ankara was in "ongoing" talks with Russia and Ukraine to open a corridor via the Bosphorus.• Two captured Russian soldiers have pleaded guilty to shelling a town in eastern Ukraine, in the second war crimes trial since Russian troops invaded the country. Alexander Bobikin and

[Alexander Ivanov acknowledged being part of an artillery unit](#) that fired at targets in the Kharkiv region from Russia's Belgorod region.

- **There are about 8,000 Ukrainian prisoners of war held in the Russian-backed self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, the Luhansk official Rodion Miroshnik has said.** "That's a lot, [and literally hundreds are being added every day.](#)" Miroshnik was quoted by the Russian Tass news agency as saying.
- **The deputy prime minister of the Russian-appointed Crimean government, Georgy Muradov, has said the Sea of Azov is "forever lost to Ukraine".** Russia's Ria news agency also quoted a Russian-appointed official in the occupied Zaporizhzhia region as [saying that the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions would never be returned to the control of the Kyiv.](#)
- **Russia has [deployed mobile propaganda vans](#) with large-screen televisions to humanitarian aid points in the captured city of Mariupol.** The Orwellian turn comes as the Kremlin continued to push forward with efforts to integrate newly occupied territories across the south of Ukraine.
- **Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, has said China's cooperation with Vladimir Putin after his invasion of Ukraine "raises alarm bells".** Blinken criticised the Chinese president, [Xi Jinping, for defending Putin's "war to erase Ukraine's sovereignty"](#) and said it was "a charged moment for the world".
- **Alexander Lukashenko, the Belarusian president who is a close Putin ally, has ordered the creation of a new military command for the south of the country bordering Ukraine.** The Belarusian armed forces previously said they would deploy special operations troops in three areas near its southern border with Ukraine. [Lukashenko has also talked up the role of Russian-made missiles](#) in boosting the country's defences.
- **Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, said that "weapons, weapons and weapons again" are what the country needs.** "We need more heavy weapons delivered as soon as possible, especially MLRS (multiple launch rocket systems) to repel Russian attacks," Kuleba [said](#).
- **The US is preparing to send advanced, long-range rocket systems to Ukraine** after an [urgent request from Ukrainian officials](#), multiple officials reportedly told [CNN](#). Kuleba said Ukraine's most urgent need is for multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) to counter Russian superiority in heavy weaponry. Zelenskiy also referred to the weapons as "the systems that are really needed to stop this aggression" in his latest [address](#).
- **Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) has complained about divisions inside the European Union over more sanctions against Russia** and asked why some nations were being allowed to block the plan. "How many more weeks will the European Union try to agree on a sixth package?" Zelenskiy asked in his latest national [address](#). "Pressure on Russia is literally a matter of saving lives," he added.
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and Italian prime minister Mario Draghi held a phone call to discuss the situation in Ukraine and the issue of global food security** on Thursday. Speaking to journalists after the call, Draghi said he would continue talking to both Moscow and Kyiv to resolve the food crisis, but added that he had little optimism for ending the war. "When asked if I have seen any glimmer of hope for peace, the answer is no," he said.
- **Russian troops occupying the south-eastern port city of Mariupol have cancelled school summer holidays to prepare pupils for switching to a Russian curriculum, according to officials.** "The main goal is to eradicate everything Ukrainian and prepare for the new school year, which will be according to the Russian curriculum," city official Petro Andryushchenko [said](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Russia forces continue strikes on Kharkiv
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/kharkiv-hit-by-fresh-strikes-amid-fears-city-is-still-on-russian-agenda
GIST	Artillery has pounded the city of Kharkiv for the first time in two weeks, just as life in Ukraine's second city was starting to return to normal after Russian troops were pushed back from its outlying towns and villages.

Kharkiv's regional governor, Oleh Synehubov, said at least nine people had been killed and 17 injured in the attacks on the northern part of the city.

"There's no logic to it, it's just terror against the local population, to sow panic and to destroy critical infrastructure," said Synehubov, dressed in military fatigues with a pistol at his hip, in an interview with the Guardian in central Kharkiv shortly after the attacks.

The largely Russian-speaking city near the border of the two countries was heavily attacked during the first days of the war as Russian forces tried to take control, but they were pushed back to the suburbs. The Russians sent artillery and missiles into the city, on one occasion destroying the regional administration building, housed in a grand Stalin-era structure.

The Russians have been pushed further back over the last six weeks as Ukrainian forces regained control of several towns and villages, [but they remain well within artillery range of the city centre](#).

"For two weeks it's been relatively quiet ... I think this is them saying hello, telling us they are still there, trying to create panic," Synehubov said.

The booms of incoming and outgoing artillery fire were audible throughout Thursday, shaking buildings and setting off car alarms in central Kharkiv.

In the afternoon, a deep shell crater was left on Otakara Yarosha Street in front of a block of flats from which the windows on all five floors had been blown out. Police at the scene said they did not know how many people had died there.

Outside the 23 August metro station, a blast had brought down large branches from several trees, and dead pigeons and tangled electricity cables lay scattered across a wide expanse of concrete. Shrapnel had torn holes in a nearby second world war monument.

It was not immediately obvious whether people had died at the scene, and there were few people around to ask, as air raid sirens and the booms of artillery sounded.

A steady flow of residents had started to return to their homes in the city. A few cafes and restaurants had opened, people were strolling in city parks on Thursday morning and this week, and the metro began operating again for the first time since the invasion. In recent weeks, its main use has been as a bomb shelter, with thousands living on its underground platforms.

The city mayor, Ihor Terekhov, told residents: "We will not stop the metro, but we will allocate special sectors where you can stay and shelter from bombing."

After Russia failed in its assaults on Kyiv and Kharkiv in the early days of the war, Moscow has concentrated much of its efforts on a bloody offensive to take more territory in the Donbas region. But Thursday's attacks raised fears that Kharkiv could still be on the agenda.

"The Russian troops are engaged in a counter-offensive, and are trying to reoccupy territories that were liberated by our troops just a month ago," said Oleksandr Filchakov, Kharkiv region's chief prosecutor, in an interview with the Guardian. He said he believed the ultimate aim was to launch a renewed assault on the city itself.

Filchakov also noted reports that Russian troops were unloading Iskander missiles at the railway station in Belgorod, just across the border.

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	<p>For now, said Synehubov, a renewed ground assault on the city was not possible. “They are firing from the positions they have held for a long time; they are constantly trying to counterattack but our forces are holding their positions.”</p> <p>He said there was not a significant enough buildup of new troops and equipment on the other side of the border to signal the capacity for a new assault on the city. “But that’s right now, and the situation can change at any minute,” he added.</p> <p>However, Synehubov said, the main problem for the Kharkiv region, unlike others, was that the Russians continued to shell settlements after they had retreated.</p> <p>“In Kyiv, Sumy, Chernihiv regions, the Russians fought for a certain period, realised they had hit a wall and then took the decision to retreat, and they retreated fully from these territories,” he said.</p> <p>“Here, even if we liberate a place, then the enemy stays in its positions and keeps hitting it, and we can’t properly evacuate people, we can’t bring humanitarian aid, because these places are under permanent fire. We can’t bring in de-mining teams because of the shelling, so we need to push the enemy back even further so they would focus on our positions and not on population centres,” he said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/27 Hope for diplomacy end Russia invasion?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/27/what-hope-is-there-for-diplomacy-in-ending-the-russia-ukraine-war
GIST	<p>An increasingly bitter diplomatic row over Germany’s unwillingness to supply heavy weaponry to Ukraine threatened to spill into a wider dispute between allies over whether they are prepared to accept a peace settlement that leaves Vladimir Putin capable of claiming victory.</p> <p>One western official said western leaders are divided between those who think they can work with Vladimir Putin’s Russia once the war is over, and those who think they cannot.</p> <p>The row is leading to disputes over the arming of Ukraine, the feasibility of enforcing a Russian oil import embargo and whether Kyiv will have to accept a further loss of territory at the end of the war as the price for peace.</p> <p>The immediate point of conflict between Ukraine and some of its allies focusses on the supply of weaponry to Ukraine, and the heavy weather Germany seems to be making in setting up an elaborate chain that would see the country supplying armaments to its Eastern neighbours – principally Poland and the Czech Republic – that would in turn send armoury on to Ukraine.</p> <p>Kyiv is suffering serious losses due to the absence of long-range weaponry. The commander-in-chief of Ukraine’s armed forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said the delivery of weapons could not be delayed: “We are in great need of weapons that will make it possible to hit the enemy from a long distance.”</p> <p>Citing its sources in Nato, the national news agency, Deutsche Presse Agentur, reported that alliance members have informally agreed not to supply certain weaponry to Ukraine, fearing Russia could see the delivery of tanks and combat aircraft as the west entering the war and take retaliatory measures. Quite what this decision means in practical terms is disputed.</p> <p>There were also US-sourced reports that Israel had rejected a US request to allow Germany to send Spike anti-tank missiles to Ukraine. Spike missiles are produced in Germany with Israeli technology under an Israeli licence. Since the beginning of Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, Israel has taken a neutral stance and refused to supply weapons to Ukraine.</p> <p>The disputes come as some influential US voices, from veteran diplomat Henry Kissinger to the New York Times, have urged Ukraine to realise it may have to lose territory to Putin.</p>

In a reference to the tensions, the UK foreign secretary Liz Truss, a staunch war hawk, warned the West against backsliding and appeasement, insisting the need to supply arms was urgent in a speech in Sarajevo: “What we cannot have is any lifting of sanctions, any appeasement, which will simply make Putin stronger in the longer term.” She insists private sanctions on Russia cannot be lifted until Putin has completely left Ukraine, and his army is irreversibly weakened. She has strong allies in eastern Europe, and the Baltics, but not in Paris or Berlin.

Truss has argued that any backsliding would result in a more prolonged and painful conflict.

Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, adopted an ironic, almost uncomprehending tone at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week about the slowness of arms deliveries: “We are pursuing this with strategic patience. I don’t understand why this is so difficult.” The president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, sensed German reticence stemmed from a desire to rebuild relations with Putin once the war ends. “No matter what the Russian state does, there is someone who says: ‘Let’s take his interests into account’,” said Zelenskiy.

Poland has also heavily criticised Germany’s slowness, and within Germany the chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has come under attack for appearing not to want either side to emerge victorious from the war, a stance Scholz denies.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, chair of the Bundestag Defense Committee and a member of the Free Democrat party, said: “It must not be that at the end of the war the world sees Germany as a complete brakeman and loser just because we are unable to organise and communicate.”

Early in the conflict Germany proposed quickly supplying Ukraine with heavy weaponry in a “ring system” – whereby eastern European countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic would provide Soviet-era tanks to Ukraine, with these being replenished by modern German Leopard tanks. Whether the failure to achieve this yet is due to bureaucratic inertia, cynical procrastination or a reflection of the depleted state of the German armed forces is hard to unravel. If you are on the frontline, it probably matters little.

In a speech in Davos, Scholz tried to dismiss claims that he did not understand the scale of the issues at stake. He said the 24 February invasion had come like a thunderclap.

He described Putin’s war as “imperialism” that is “trying to bomb us back to a time when war was a common tool. It is not only the statehood of Ukraine at stake but a world order that binds might to law”. He claimed Putin had already missed all of his strategic goals. “A capture of all of Ukraine by Russia seems further away today than it was at the beginning of the war. More than ever, Ukraine is emphasising its European future.”

He added that “our goal is clear. Putin must not win this war”. His remarks, insisting there can be no peace dictated by Putin, contrast with those of Boris Johnson, who has always insisted Putin must lose the war and be seen to lose the war.

Truss was one of the first European figures to echo Ukrainian claims that it cannot lose territory in the war, but must regain land lost to Russian separatists since 2014. The Polish president, Andrzej Duda, in Kyiv this week said: “Only Ukraine has the right to decide about its future. No decisions can be taken about its future without it.” Although there are different voices within the Ukrainian diplomatic landscape, Zelenskiy’s public position appears to be broadly the same. He told a meeting at Davos that he joined by video link: “When Ukraine says it is fighting to regain its territories, it means that Ukraine will fight until it restores all of its territory. It doesn’t mean anything else. It’s about our sovereignty, our territorial integrity and our independence.”

He added: “This state of ‘hot’ hostilities, of bloody war, can only move into diplomatic negotiations with the authentic participation of the Russian and Ukrainian presidents, supported by our strategic partners,

when we see that the Russian Federation shows real willingness and desire to move from bloody war to diplomacy. This will be possible only when Russia concedes at least something, such as pulling back troops to the borders as they were on February 24.”

At present there does not seem to be any likelihood of Russia signalling such a retreat. Quite the opposite.

But that does not mean countries are not coming forward to offer their mediation services. Italy’s prime minister, Mario Draghi, for instance, has assembled a complex four-point plan that was formally presented to the UN secretary general, António Guterres.

The first step in the plan would involve a supervised ceasefire and “demilitarisation” of the frontline. This would be a multilateral negotiation at a conference on the future status of Ukraine, resuscitating the proposal of future Ukrainian neutrality backed by security guarantees provided by major powers. This could give a security umbrella to Ukraine before the end of the peace process, and act as a substitute for Ukraine’s one-time aspiration to Nato membership.

The next stage would be a bilateral treaty between Ukraine and Russia on “border issues”. The language of the proposal points to free movement of people and economic life, de facto autonomy for the occupied territories and a single economic zone, as well as civil guarantees for Russian minorities, including over language. This would be very close to the Minsk agreement, a format that France and Germany oversaw and the Ukrainians never liked.

The final stage would be a grand bargain on EU/Nato-Russia relations, revival of strategic stability talks, a new role for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and a revisiting of some of the other issues that were being discussed between the US and Russia last summer.

Russia seemed to take great pleasure in ridiculing both the plan and its proponent. The former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev blasted Draghi’s proposals: “It seems that it was prepared not by diplomats, but by local political scientists who have read provincial newspapers and operate only with Ukrainian fakes.” Yet other voices in Russia think there are aspects of the plan that could be adopted later, when both sides have fought themselves to a standstill.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/27 DRC refugees stream over Uganda border
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/27/you-hear-bullets-you-run-congolese-refugees-stream-over-ugandas-border
GIST	<p>The rain will determine what time Uwimana Nsengiyuava gets on the truck to Nyakabande transit centre, where Uganda is hosting 20,000 refugees who, like her, have fled fresh fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).</p> <p>Since March, up to 500 refugees a day have been silently streaming into the east African country via Kisoro, a picturesque district in south-west Uganda dotted with endless hills, streams and a lake.</p> <p>Uganda is home to 1.5 million refugees, the most hosted by any African country. An open-door policy allows refugees to live freely and settle anywhere. Most choose to stay in settlements where they are given land to farm by the government. New arrivals, such as those coming in from DRC, live in holding centres. Here they wait to see if the situation in their countries is improving, and they can return home. Or if they must start a new life in a new country.</p> <p>Nsengiyuava leans on the metal pole that marks the Uganda-DRC border in Bunagana, 12 miles (20km) from her destination at Nyakabande. If the clouds send rain, it will drive four of her children from wherever they are playing, and she will get on the United Nations high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) truck early. If the rain holds off, the children will enjoy their games until the evening.</p>

Only the darkness will bring them back to their mother. She waits, rocking their baby brother on her back, and hopes that her older children will appear.

“This is how they were, even in DRC. They would go and play and return in the evening to find I already went to the garden, got food and prepared it,” Nsengiyuava says with a slight laugh.

Her children’s play is the only thing that remains constant for her. She walked throughout the night, reaching the Ugandan border after dawn. She left behind her husband and grandmother. She left behind her treasured saucepans, some only bought recently. She could not even pick out clothes for herself and the children.

“When you hear bullets, you run and try to save your life. You take what you can and leave behind everything else,” she says.

The journey to safety is hard and unfamiliar. People often travel long distances on an empty stomach – pelted by the rain, scorched by the sun and sleeping under trees when night falls.

“They reach the border tired and hungry,” says Emily Doe, the area representative for the World Food Programme (WFP).

Last year, the WFP gave \$44m (\$35m) in cash and nearly 80,000 tonnes of food to refugees. This is only a fraction of what refugees need to survive. Even with the generous support of donors such as the EU, US and China, the WFP is unable to provide full food rations to refugees. The refugees most in need receive a 70% ration while the relatively less vulnerable receive a 40% ration. All new arrivals, including those in Nyakabande, receive full food assistance for a month.

“The fire never goes off. In Nyakabande, the WFP runs five kitchens 24 hours a day, providing lunch, breakfast and supper,” Doe says. “But we do not know how long this will go on – we are stretched. We need more funding, more donors, to support Uganda’s refugee response.”

The hot food is still some way off for Nsengiyuava and her family. At the transit centre, the WFP will give them special high-energy biscuits to revive them. Medical teams will screen them for malnutrition and give them nutritious food if they need it. The Ugandan government will work with the UNHCR to register and provide them with shelter.

“I cannot wait to reach Nyakabande. I have heard that there is everything I need to survive there. I do not need much – if I find food and a bed, I will be happy,” Nsengiyuava says.

The rains start to fall and her children reappear just in time to get on the UNHCR truck. The elderly and sick people get in first. Then Nsengiyuava and other women with children. Some of the children are unaccompanied, jumping in silently or hanging on to the skirts of kind strangers. Able-bodied women and men get in last. Many refugees linger around the truck, not quite ready to take the next step.

“Getting on the truck is not an easy decision,” says Adele, who has stayed at the border for a month in the hope that the fighting will stop, and she can return home.

“I know the UN is there to help us,” she says, “but it is hard to let go of hope, get on the truck and admit that it is time to consider a different life.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Texas parents angry over police response
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/uvalde-residents-voice-frustration-over-shooting-response-11653588161
GIST	UVALDE, Texas—Local residents voiced anger Thursday about the time it took to end the mass shooting at an elementary school here, as police laid out a fresh timeline that showed the gunman entered the building unobstructed after lingering outside for 12 minutes firing shots.

Victor Escalon, a regional director for the Texas Department of Public Safety, gave a new timeline of how the now-deceased gunman, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, walked into Robb Elementary School, barricaded himself in a classroom and killed 19 children and two teachers.

Mr. Escalon said he couldn't say why no one stopped Ramos from entering the school during that time Tuesday. Most of the shots Ramos fired came during the first several minutes after he entered the school, Mr. Escalon said.

People who arrived at the school while Ramos locked himself in a classroom, or saw videos of police waiting outside, were furious.

"The police were doing nothing," said Angeli Rose Gomez, who after learning about the shooting drove 40 miles to Robb Elementary, where her children are in second and third grade. "They were just standing outside the fence. They weren't going in there or running anywhere."

Mr. Escalon said officers inside the school were evacuating students and school employees from the premises, as well as calling for backup. "There's a lot going on," he said.

Department of Public Safety officials previously said an armed school officer confronted Ramos as he arrived at the school. Mr. Escalon said Thursday that information was incorrect and no one encountered Ramos as he arrived at the school. "There was not an officer readily available and armed," Mr. Escalon said.

Ramos shot his grandmother Tuesday morning and drove her truck to Robb Elementary School, crashing the vehicle into a nearby ditch at 11:28 a.m., according to the timeline laid out by Mr. Escalon. He then began shooting at people at a funeral home across the street, prompting a 911 call reporting a gunman at the school at 11:30. Ramos climbed a chain-link fence about 8 feet high onto school grounds and began firing before walking inside, unimpeded, at 11:40. The first police arrived on the scene at 11:44 and exchanged gunfire with Ramos, who locked himself in a fourth-grade classroom. There, he killed the students and teachers.

A Border Patrol tactical team went into the school an hour later, around 12:40 p.m., and was able to get into the classroom and kill Ramos, Mr. Escalon said.

Kaitlyn Martinez, a fourth-grader at Robb Elementary, was playing with other kids during recess when Ramos first appeared on school grounds with an AR-15 style rifle.

"We all ran in and they told us to sit down and they turned off the lights and locked the door," the 10-year-old said, holding back tears, as she laid flowers with her family at a makeshift memorial for victims in downtown Uvalde.

Kaitlyn said three police officers eventually came to the door of her room, which was near the one in which Ramos locked himself. "They told us there was a gunman, so we had to evacuate and we all had to run to the parking spaces," she recalled.

Outside she found her mother, Gladys Castillon, who had been pleading with police to act more aggressively to end the standoff as she waited.

Ms. Gomez, a farm supervisor, was also waiting outside for her children. She said she was one of numerous parents who began encouraging—first politely, and then with more urgency—police and other law enforcement to enter the school sooner. After a few minutes, she said, U.S. Marshals put her in handcuffs, telling her she was being arrested for intervening in an active investigation.

Ms. Gomez said she convinced local Uvalde police officers whom she knew to persuade the marshals to set her free.

A spokesman for the U.S. Marshals Service said deputy marshals never placed anyone in handcuffs while securing Robb Elementary's perimeter. "Our deputy marshals maintained order and peace in the midst of the grief-stricken community that was gathering around the school," he said.

Ms. Gomez described the scene as frantic. She said she saw a father tackled and thrown to the ground by police and a third pepper-sprayed. Once freed from her cuffs, Ms. Gomez made her distance from the crowd, jumped the school fence, and ran inside to grab her two children. She sprinted out of the school with them.

Videos circulated on social media Wednesday and Thursday of frantic family members trying to get access to Robb Elementary as the attack was unfolding, some of them yelling at police who blocked them from entering.

"Shoot him or something!" a woman's voice can be heard yelling on a video, before a man is heard saying about the officers, "They're all just [expletive] parked outside, dude. They need to go in there."

The videos were collected by Storyful, a social-media research company owned by News Corp, parent company of The Wall Street Journal.

Bob Estrada lives directly across the street from the school, which his grandson attends. The 77-year-old said he and his wife walked outside when they heard gunshots and were confused why the police who arrived didn't immediately enter.

"They are trying to cover something up," he said of the information released Thursday. "I think the cops were waiting for backup because they didn't want to go into the school."

The Uvalde Police Department couldn't be reached for comment.

Asked at the press conference why law enforcement weren't able to respond in the initial 12 minutes Ramos was outside the school, Mr. Escalon said that was part of the investigation. "Our job is to report the facts and have answers. We're not there yet," he said.

Mr. Escalon also said police aren't sure how Ramos was able to enter the school building. "We will find out more about why it was unlocked—or maybe it was locked—but right now it appears that it was unlocked," he said.

Jay Martin, who lives four blocks from Robb Elementary and walked there after hearing gunfire, said the police's timeline doesn't match what he saw in person and online.

"Nothing is adding up," he said. "People are just really frustrated because no one is coming out and telling us the real truth of what went down."

But Danny Ruiz, whose great-niece died in the attack, said he arrived at the school after hearing gunfire and felt grateful for the police response.

"The Border Patrol agent who took him out, to me, that guy is a hero," said Mr. Ruiz, 51.

After the confrontation at the school ended with Ramos dead, school buses began to arrive to transport students from the school, according to Ms. Gomez. She said she saw police use a Taser on a local father who approached the bus to collect his child.

"They didn't do that to the shooter, but they did that to us. That's how it felt," Ms. Gomez said.

Thursday's expressions of frustration came after more than 1,000 people from this grieving city gathered Wednesday night for a prayer vigil.

“God is here with us tonight,” Pastor Tony Gruben, of Baptist Temple Church, told the people gathered at the Uvalde County Fairplex. “God still loves you and God still loves those little children.”

Local residents packed the stands, spilled into the aisles and stood on the dirt rodeo floor where the ministers preached from a stage under flags of Texas and the U.S. White cowboy hats dotted the audience along with scores of maroon T-shirts that said “Uvalde Coyotes,” the high school mascot.

President Biden and first lady Jill Biden will travel to Uvalde on Sunday to grieve with the community, the White House said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 What constitutes victory in Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/us/politics/zelensky-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Three months into Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, America and its allies are quietly debating the inevitable question: How does this end?</p> <p>In recent days, presidents and prime ministers as well as the Democratic and Republican Party leaders in the United States have called for victory in Ukraine. But just beneath the surface are real divisions about what that would look like — and whether “victory” has the same definition in the United States, in Europe and, perhaps most importantly, in Ukraine.</p> <p>In the past few days alone there has been an Italian proposal for a cease-fire, a vow from Ukraine’s leadership to push Russia back to the borders that existed before the invasion was launched on Feb. 24, and renewed discussion by administration officials about a “strategic defeat” for President Vladimir V. Putin — one that would assure that he is incapable of mounting a similar attack again.</p> <p>After three months of remarkable unity in response to the Russian invasion — resulting in a flow of lethal weapons into Ukrainian hands and a broad array of financial sanctions that almost no one expected, least of all Mr. Putin — the emerging fissures about what to do next are notable.</p> <p>At their heart lies a fundamental debate about whether the three-decade-long project to integrate Russia should end. At a moment when the U.S. refers to Russia as a pariah state that needs to be cut off from the world economy, others, largely in Europe, are warning of the dangers of isolating and humiliating Mr. Putin.</p> <p>That argument is playing out as American ambitions expand. What began as an effort to make sure Russia did not have an easy victory over Ukraine shifted as soon as the Russian military began to make error after error, failing to take Kyiv. The administration now sees a chance to punish Russian aggression, weaken Mr. Putin, shore up NATO and the trans-Atlantic alliance and send a message to China, too. Along the way, it wants to prove that aggression is not rewarded with territorial gains.</p> <p>The differences over war aims broke into the open at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week, as Henry Kissinger, the 99-year old former secretary of state, suggested that Ukraine would likely have to give up some territory in a negotiated settlement, though he added that “ideally the dividing line should be a return to the status quo” before the invasion, which included the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the seizure of parts of the Donbas.</p> <p>“Pursuing the war beyond that point would not be about the freedom of Ukraine, but a new war against Russia itself,” Mr. Kissinger concluded.</p> <p>Almost immediately, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine accused Mr. Kissinger of appeasement, retorting angrily that “I get the sense that instead of the year 2022, Mr. Kissinger has 1938 on his calendar.” He was referring to the year Hitler began his sweep across Europe — the event that caused Mr.</p>

Kissinger, then a teenager, to flee with his family to New York. “Nobody heard from him then that it was necessary to adapt to the Nazis instead of fleeing them or fighting them.”

But Mr. Zelensky has at various moments voiced contradictory views on what it would take to end the war, even offering to commit his country to “neutrality” rather than aspiring to join NATO.

Differing objectives, of course, make it all the more difficult to define what victory — or even a muddled peace — would look like. And they foreshadow a coming debate about what position Mr. Zelensky and his Western allies would take if negotiations to end the conflict finally get going. If Mr. Zelensky agreed to some concessions, would the United States and its allies lift many of their crushing sanctions, including the export controls that have forced Russia to shutter some of its factories for building tanks? Or would doing that doom their hopes of crippling Russia’s future capabilities?

In the end, American officials say, the hard choices will have to be made by Mr. Zelensky and his government. But they are acutely aware that if Mr. Putin gets his land bridge to Crimea, or sanctions are partially lifted, Mr. Biden will be accused by Republican critics — and perhaps some Democrats — of essentially rewarding Mr. Putin for his effort to redraw the map of Europe by force.

The debate is breaking out just as the shape of the war is changing, once again.

Three months ago, Mr. Putin’s own strategic objective was to take all of Ukraine — a task he thought he could accomplish in mere days. When that failed in spectacular fashion, he retreated to Plan B, withdrawing his forces to Ukraine’s east and south. It then became clear that [he could not take key cities like Kharkiv](#) and Odesa. Now the battle has come down to the Donbas, the bleak, industrial heartland of Ukraine, a relatively small area where he has already made gains, including the brutal takeover of Mariupol and a land bridge to Crimea. His greatest leverage is his naval blockade of the ports Ukraine needs to export wheat and other farm products, a linchpin of the Ukrainian economy and a major source of food for the world.

So far, with Russia gaining ground, there is no evidence yet that Mr. Putin is willing to enter negotiations. But pressure will build as sanctions bite deeper into his energy exports, and the cutoff of key components hampers weapons production for his depleted military.

“Putin, whether we like it or not, will have to bring home some bacon, and Mariupol is a small slice, but a slice,” Dov S. Zakheim, a former senior official in the Defense Department, said in a recent interview. “And the cost to Ukraine of life and matériel will continue to increase. So it’s a difficult political decision for Ukraine.”

From Biden, a Drive to Cripple Russia

For the first two months of the war, President Biden and his top aides largely spoke about providing Ukraine with whatever help it needed to defend itself — and about punishing Russia with sanctions on an unprecedented scale.

Every once in a while, there were hints of broader goals that went beyond pushing Russia back to its own borders. Even before the invasion, Jake Sullivan, the president’s national security adviser, warned that if Russia attempted to take Ukraine by force, “its long-term power and influence will be diminished.”

But on April 25, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, speaking with a bluntness that took his colleagues by surprise, acknowledged that Washington wanted more than a Russian retreat. It wanted its military permanently damaged.

“We want to see Russia weakened to the degree it cannot do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,” Mr. Austin said.

Mr. Austin’s candor prompted the White House to insist he wasn’t changing policy — just giving voice to the reality of what the sanctions and export controls were intended to do. But over time administration

officials have gradually shifted in tone, talking more openly and optimistically about the possibility of Ukrainian victory in the Donbas.

Last week in Warsaw, the U.S. ambassador to NATO, Julianne Smith, a former national security aide to Mr. Biden, said: “We want to see a strategic defeat of Russia.”

Now, in meetings with Europeans and in public statements, administration officials are articulating more specific goals. The first is that Ukraine must emerge as a vibrant, democratic state — exactly what Mr. Putin was seeking to crush.

The second is Mr. Biden’s oft-repeated goal of avoiding direct conflict with Russia. “That’s called World War III,” Mr. Biden has said repeatedly.

Then come various versions of the goal Mr. Austin articulated: that Russia must emerge as a weakened state. In testimony earlier this month, Avril D. Haines, the director of national intelligence, explained Washington’s concern. “We assess President Putin is preparing for prolonged conflict in Ukraine, during which he still intends to achieve goals beyond the Donbas,” she said.

And increasingly, American officials talk about using the crisis to strengthen international security, winning over nations that were on the fence between allying with the West or with an emerging China-Russia axis.

As the United States hones its message, no one wants to get ahead of Mr. Zelensky, after months of administration proclamations that there will be “nothing decided about Ukraine without Ukraine.”

“President Zelensky is the democratically elected president of a sovereign nation, and only he can decide what victory is going to look like and how he wants to achieve it,” John F. Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, said on April 29.

In Europe, Unity Begins to Fracture

NATO and the European Union have been surprisingly united so far in supporting Ukraine, both with painful economic sanctions aimed at Russia and in supplying an increasing quantity of weapons to Ukraine, though not jet fighters or advanced tanks.

But that unity is under strain. Hungary, which has supported five earlier sanctions packages, has balked at an embargo on Russian oil, on which it depends. And the Europeans are not even trying, at least for now, to cut off their imports of Russian gas.

The divisions are visible in war aims, too.

Leaders in central and eastern Europe, with its long experience of Soviet domination, have strong views about defeating Russia — even rejecting the idea of speaking to Mr. Putin. Estonia’s prime minister, Kaja Kallas, and Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, speak of him as a war criminal, as Mr. Biden did.

“All these events should wake us from our geopolitical slumber and cause us to cast off our delusions, our old delusions, but is that enough?” Mr. Morawiecki said last week. “I hear there are attempts to allow Putin to somehow save face in the international arena. But how can you save something that has been utterly disfigured?” he asked.

But France, Italy and Germany, the biggest and richest countries of the bloc, are anxious about a long war or one that ends frozen in a stalemate, and nervous of the possible damage to their own economies.

Those countries also think of Russia as an inescapable neighbor that cannot be isolated forever. Following his re-election, Emmanuel Macron of France began hedging his bets, declaring that a future peace in

Eastern Europe must not include an unnecessary humiliation of Russia, and could include territorial concessions to Moscow.

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi called this month for a cease-fire in Ukraine “as soon as possible” to enable a negotiated end to the war. Mr. Draghi, who has taken a hard line against Russia in traditionally Moscow-friendly Italy, said economic pressure was important “because we have to bring Moscow to the negotiating table.”

Zelensky’s Choice: Territorial Integrity or Grinding War

Mr. Zelensky has been careful not to expand his aims toward a larger degradation of Mr. Putin’s regime. He has said repeatedly that he wants the Russians pushed back to where they were on Feb. 23, before the large-scale invasion started.

Only then, he has said, would Ukraine be prepared to negotiate seriously again with Russia about a cease-fire and a settlement. He said again this week that the war will have to end with a diplomatic solution, not a sweeping military victory.

But even those aims are considered by some European officials and military experts to be ambitious. To get there, Ukraine would have to take back Kherson and the ravaged city of Mariupol. It would have to push Russia out of its land bridge to Crimea and stop Russia from annexing large parts of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Many experts fear that is beyond Ukraine’s capability.

While Ukraine did remarkably well in the first phase of the war, Donbas is very different. To go on the offensive normally requires a manpower advantage of 3 to 1, weaponry aside, which Ukraine does not now possess. The Russians are making slow but incremental gains, if at a high cost in casualties. (While Washington and London are happy to provide estimates of Russian casualties, sometimes rather high, according to some military experts, they say little about Ukrainian casualties. Ukraine is treating those figures as state secrets.)

“What is victory for Ukraine?” asked Daniel Fried, a former U.S. ambassador to Poland and longtime senior U.S. diplomat. “The Biden Administration’s comfort zone is not a bad place to be — that it’s up to the Ukrainians to decide,” Mr. Fried said. “I agree, because there’s no way a detailed conversation now on what is a just settlement will do any good, because it comes down to what territories Ukraine should surrender.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 US strategy on China: shape environment
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/us/politics/china-policy-biden.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said Thursday that despite Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China remains the greatest challenger to the United States and its allies, and that the Biden administration aims to “shape the strategic environment” around the Asian superpower to limit its increasingly aggressive actions.</p> <p>“China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do it,” Mr. Blinken said in a speech laying out the administration’s strategy on China. “Beijing’s vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world’s progress over the past 75 years.”</p> <p>The speech was the first public overview of President Biden’s approach to China, and it is based on a much longer classified strategy that was largely completed last fall. U.S. officials say that decades of direct economic and diplomatic engagement to compel the Chinese Communist Party to abide by American-led rules, agreements and institutions have largely failed, and Mr. Blinken asserted that the goal now should be to form coalitions with other nations to limit the party’s global power and curb its aggressions.</p>

“We can’t rely on Beijing to change its trajectory,” he said. “So we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open and inclusive international system.”

China’s open alignment with Russia before and during Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine have further clarified for American and European officials the difficulties of engaging with Beijing. On Feb. 4, almost three weeks before the invasion, President Vladimir V. Putin met with President Xi Jinping in Beijing as their two governments issued a 5,000-word statement announcing a “no limits” partnership that aims to oppose the international diplomatic and economic systems overseen by the United States and its allies. Since the war began, the Chinese government has given Russia diplomatic support by reiterating Mr. Putin’s criticisms of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and spreading disinformation and conspiracy theories that undermine the United States and Ukraine.

“Beijing’s defense of President Putin’s war to erase Ukraine’s sovereignty and secure a sphere of influence in Europe should raise alarm bells for all of us who call the Indo-Pacific region home,” Mr. Blinken said to an audience at George Washington University.

Mr. Blinken emphasized that the United States does not seek to overthrow the Communist Party or subvert China’s political system and that the two nations — nuclear powers with entwined economies — could work together on some issues. However, Chinese officials will almost certainly regard major parts of the speech as the outlines of an effort at containment of China, similar to previous American policy toward the Soviet Union.

In private conversations, Chinese officials have expressed concern about the emphasis on regional alliances under Mr. Biden and their potential to hem in China.

Mr. Blinken pointed to the creation last year of a security pact, called AUKUS, among Australia, Britain and the United States. The work on coalition building is the opposite of the approach of President Donald J. Trump, who denounced U.S. partners and alliances as part of his “America First” foreign policy.

Mr. Blinken’s speech revolved around the slogan for the Biden strategy: “Invest, Align and Compete.” The partnerships fall under the “align” part. “Invest” refers to pouring resources into the United States — administration officials point to the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law passed last year as an example. And “compete” refers to the rivalry with China, a framing the Trump administration also promoted.

Both administrations emphasized the same core problems in U.S.-China relations: The integration of China’s economy with those of the United States and its allies gives Beijing enormous strategic leverage. And the wealth that China has amassed from trade helps it chip away at American dominance of the global economy and technology as well as military power in the Asia-Pacific region.

“Beijing wants to put itself at the center of global innovation and manufacturing, increase other countries’ technological dependence, and then use that dependence to impose its foreign policy preferences,” Mr. Blinken said. “And Beijing is going to great lengths to win this contest — for example, taking advantage of the openness of our economies to spy, to hack, to steal technology and know-how to advance its military innovation and entrench its surveillance state.”

Mr. Blinken also said that to meet the challenges Beijing posed, he was creating a “China House” team to coordinate policy across the State Department and work with Congress.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesman at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said after the speech that “competition does exist in some areas such as trade, but it should not be used to define the overall picture of China-U.S. relations.”

“It is never China’s goal to surpass or replace the U.S. or engage in zero-sum competition with it,” he added.

Mr. Blinken also noted the human rights abuses, repression of ethnic minorities and quashing of free speech and assembly by the Communist Party in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong. In recent years, those issues have galvanized greater animus toward China among Democratic and Republican politicians and policymakers. “We’ll continue to raise these issues and call for change,” he said.

But Mr. Blinken sought to defuse any misunderstandings over Taiwan, the biggest single flashpoint in U.S.-China relations. He reiterated longstanding U.S. policy on Taiwan, despite remarks by Mr. Biden in Tokyo on Monday that the United States has a “commitment” to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan if China attacks the self-governing democratic island. The U.S. government for decades has maintained a policy of “strategic ambiguity” on Taiwan — leaving unsaid whether it would use force to protect the island from China — and has opposed Taiwan independence.

Mr. Blinken said it was China’s recent actions toward Taiwan — trying to sever the island’s diplomatic and international ties and sending fighter jets over the area — that are “deeply destabilizing.”

“While our policy has not changed, what has changed is Beijing’s growing coercion,” he said.

Yawei Liu, a political scientist at Emory University and director of the China Research Center in Atlanta, said Mr. Blinken’s words would not reassure Beijing. “I don’t think this is going to satisfy the China side,” he said in a Twitter Spaces conversation after the speech.

But Mr. Blinken stressed that despite the rising concerns, the United States was not seeking a new Cold War and would not try to isolate China, the world’s second-largest economy.

Mr. Blinken credited China’s growth to the talent and hard work of the Chinese people, as well as the stability of the agreements on global trade and diplomacy created and shaped by the United States in what Washington calls the rules-based international order.

“Arguably no country on earth has benefited more from that than China,” he said. “But rather than using its power to reinforce and revitalize the laws, agreements, principles and institutions that enabled its success, so other countries can benefit from them too, Beijing is undermining it.”

After China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, which the United States supported, leaders in Beijing carried out far-reaching changes to the nation’s planned economy to open up further to outside trade and investment, helping to transform China from one of the world’s poorest countries into its biggest factory hub, and lifting hundreds of millions of people into the global middle class.

But China stopped far short of becoming the free-market democracy that many in the West had hoped, and over the past decade, under Mr. Xi, the Communist Party and Chinese state have exerted an even heavier hand over the private market and individual freedoms.

Both Democrats and Republicans now see Chinese trade practices, including the government’s creation of heavily subsidized national champions and its acceptance of intellectual property theft, as one of the biggest factors undercutting American industry.

“For too long, Chinese companies have enjoyed far greater access to our markets than our companies have in China,” Mr. Blinken said. “This lack of reciprocity is unacceptable and it’s unsustainable.”

The administration introduced a core initiative to shape the economic environment around China — the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework — during Mr. Biden’s visit to Tokyo this week. The United States and 13 Asia-Pacific nations will try to negotiate new industry standards.

But skeptics have said Washington’s ability to shape trade in the Asia-Pacific region may be limited because the framework is not a traditional trade agreement that offers countries reductions in tariffs and more access to the lucrative American market — a move that would be politically unpopular in the United States.

Mr. Blinken did not highlight Chinese government influence operations and espionage in the United States, which had been a focal point of the Trump administration’s messaging about China. He said he welcomed Chinese exchange students, and that many of them stay — “They help drive innovation here at home, and that benefits all of us.”

“We can stay vigilant about our national security without closing our doors,” he said. “Racism and hate have no place in a nation built by generations of immigrants to fulfill the promise of opportunity for all.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 New system for migrants apply for asylum
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/us/politics/asylum-system.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration will begin to allow certain migrants to ask for asylum as they arrive at the southwestern border at the end of the month, even as it continues to use a pandemic-era public health rule to quickly turn migrants away without the option to seek it.</p> <p>The new process, intended to deliver a decision within months instead of the years it currently takes via the immigration court system, will apply to a “few hundred” migrants a month, administration officials said.</p> <p>The policy’s immediate effect is likely to be minimal, dwarfed by vast backlogs in the immigration system and a recent surge of migrants at the border, and it is far from a broad restoration of access to asylum, which was curtailed during the Trump administration and again during the pandemic. But if the Biden administration continues with its plan to roll out the policy in phases, it could represent the leading edge of what some experts see as the most sweeping change to the asylum process in a quarter-century.</p> <p>“Individuals who qualify for asylum will receive protection more swiftly, and those who are not eligible will be promptly removed rather than remaining in the U.S. for years while their cases are pending,” Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, said in a statement on Thursday. “We are delivering justice quickly, while also ensuring due process.”</p> <p>The new plan, which went through months of formal review and public comment, is President Biden’s first significant policy aimed at improving the asylum system, which he pledged to restore after its four years of decline during the Trump administration.</p> <p>The plan’s modest rollout comes during a period of record high migrant crossings along the southwestern border, as people from countries around the world have fled poverty and violence over the past year, and particularly over the past month. Some of those migrants have been allowed into the country to face removal proceedings under the existing process, but more have been swiftly expelled under a public health rule known as Title 42, which has been in place since the beginning of the pandemic.</p> <p>Of the more than 700,000 people released into the United States since Mr. Biden has been in office, most will be added to backlog of more than 1.7 million cases in the immigration court system. Outside of the few hundred asylum cases a month that will employ the new application process, the rest will continue to wend their way through the traditional process in the immigration courts.</p> <p>The migrants selected to be routed using the new process will come from a very specific subset. It includes migrants who are placed in a special category that gives immigration officials the authority to expel people without a hearing, known as expedited removal; are being held in one of two immigration detention centers in Texas; and have plans to move to Boston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark or San Francisco, the administration said.</p> <p>Under the expedited removal process, border officials ask migrants if they are afraid to return to their own countries. Those who say they are get scheduled for what is known as a credible fear interview with an asylum officer.</p>

	<p>Under the traditional system, migrants who pass those interviews join many others waiting in the United States, often for years, to appear before an immigration judge and officially apply for asylum. But under the new plan, migrants who pass the initial screening will then make their case to an asylum officer.</p> <p>Immigration advocates have criticized the new policy for not providing enough due process for migrants to build an asylum claim and appeal denials. And conservatives have argued that asylum decisions should be made by immigration judges, not asylum officers. Texas filed a lawsuit against the new plan, but it will not affect the rollout on Tuesday.</p> <p>The Department of Homeland Security did not say how many recent migrants have met the specific criteria for people eligible in the initial rollout. In April, 6,383 migrants were placed in expedited removal proceedings, according to federal data. That is just 2 percent of the total apprehensions at the border that month.</p> <p>The administration had expected to stop using the public health rule this week and return to the normal immigration processes in place before the pandemic, which would have significantly expanded the number of people placed in expedited removal proceedings, and given them access to credible fear screenings. But a recent court order has forced the administration to keep the public health rule in place. The rule, intended to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, gives border officials the authority to expel undocumented migrants without giving them a chance to ask for asylum.</p> <p>Another of the limited options for requesting asylum at the southwest border is through a Trump-era program that allows certain migrants to apply for asylum while they wait in Mexico until a decision is rendered. The Biden administration tried to end that program, calling it inhumane, but a court ordered that it be restored.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Economic impact China 'zero-Covid' policy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/26/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases?name=style-coronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline live updates block recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#china-economy-zero-covid
GIST	<p>Since the Omicron variant of the coronavirus arrived in China, the government has maintained harsh lockdowns, mass testing and border restrictions, arguing that such measures are needed to protect the population. Now, a senior leader in Beijing is flagging urgent concerns about the impact the policy is having on the country's economy, which is the second largest in the world.</p> <p>China's "zero Covid" policies have triggered an economic slowdown that is in some ways worse than the one in early 2020 during the initial outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, the country's No. 2 leader said on Wednesday as concerns grew over the impact of lockdowns.</p> <p>During a teleconference with more than 100,000 officials across China, the country's premier, Li Keqiang, announced efforts to bolster growth and urged local leaders do more on top of that to keep the economy running, according to a summary from the state-run Xinhua news agency.</p> <p>The country is at a critical point for setting its economic trend for the year, Mr. Li said, according to the Communist Party-run People's Daily. "We must seize the time window and strive to bring the economy back to the normal track," he said.</p> <p>A two-month lockdown in Shanghai, China's commercial capital, and sporadic lockdowns elsewhere have hampered assembly lines, trapped workers, snarled logistics and confined millions of consumers to their homes. In the first three months of the year, China's gross domestic product grew at 4.8 percent, below the official annual target of 5.5 percent. Since many of the harshest Covid containment measures have been imposed in the second quarter, analysts have expressed skepticism that the country can hit its growth targets.</p>

	<p>Sagging economic growth has caused other problems. China's youth unemployment rate hit 18.2 percent, just as a record number of almost 11 million students are set to graduate from universities.</p> <p>Last week, while seeking to reassure foreign executives, Mr. Li said China needed to find a balance between its "zero Covid" policy and promoting economic growth, according to groups who attended. Representatives from the Japanese, American and European chambers of commerce sat in Beijing with Mr. Li, while others joined by video. Foreign executives have told industry groups that they are cutting investment and downgrading revenue forecasts because of China's lockdowns.</p> <p>Mr. Li spoke with unusual frankness about the state of China's economy and the importance of vaccinating the older people to allow for some future loosening of policy, said Jörg Wuttke, the president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, who attended.</p> <p>China's top leader, Xi Jinping, has recently called on officials to double down on the "zero Covid" strategy. Mr. Li did not mention him at the meeting, fueling speculation that there was a conflict emerging between the two over the country's pandemic policy.</p> <p>"I don't see any factions at the top," Mr. Wuttke said, adding, "I can imagine that those in charge of the economy are clearly worried and want to have a different policy."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Long delays imaging of cancers, diseases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/health/dye-contrast-scan-shortage.html
GIST	<p>Doctors cannot seem to pinpoint what is wrong with Michael Quintos.</p> <p>Mr. Quintos, 53, a Chicago resident, has constant stomach pain. He has been hospitalized, and his doctors have tried everything including antibiotics, antacids, even removing his appendix. "I still don't feel good," Mr. Quintos said.</p> <p>His doctors recommend using a CT scan with contrast, imaging that relies on a special dye often injected into patients to better visualize their blood vessels, intestines and organs like the kidney and liver.</p> <p>But a nationwide shortage of the imaging agents needed for the procedure — the result of the recent lockdown in Shanghai to quell a Covid outbreak — has prompted hospitals to ration these tests except in emergencies.</p> <p>Like thousands of others in recent weeks, Mr. Quintos cannot get an exam using the contrast dye.</p> <p>And an alternative may not be enough to determine how to treat his illness. "The fact you can't figure it out tells me you need more tools to figure it out," he said.</p> <p>An estimated 50 million exams with contrast agents are performed each year in the United States, and as many as half the nation's hospitals are affected by the shortage. Some are reserving much of their supply on hand for use in emergency rooms — where quick, accurate assessments are most dire.</p> <p>The shortage of a vital imaging agent is the latest example of the country's vulnerability to disruptions in the global supply chain and its overreliance on a small number of manufacturers for such critical products. The Shanghai plant shuttered by the lockdown is operated by GE Healthcare, a unit of General Electric and one of two major suppliers of the iodinated contrast materials. The company supplies its dyes, Omnipaque and Visipaque, for the United States.</p> <p>Lawmakers expressed concern about the scarcity of imaging agents. "In the wealthiest nation on Earth, there should be no reason doctors are forced to ration lifesaving medical scans to compensate for a shortage of material," Representative Rosa DeLauro, Democrat of Connecticut, said in a statement. "We</p>

are seeing supply chains break down because of consolidated industries experiencing manufacturing shortages and offshoring American jobs to China.”

Testifying before a Senate committee on Thursday, Dr. Robert Califf, the commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, said the shortage of contrast media was “just unbelievable.” Noting that some members of Congress had recently suffered serious illnesses, he added: “Someone with a stroke or heart attack wouldn’t be able to get an angiogram.”

Shortages of the dye were reported to the F.D.A. earlier this month, and it said it was working closely with manufacturers “to help minimize the impact on patients.” Yet even though GE Healthcare said this week that the situation was improving now that the plant had reopened, the shortages and patient delays could persist well into the summer because of a lag in how quickly replenished supplies could be distributed.

Senator Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington, is pressing the agency to see what steps it is taking to address the shortage, according to a statement from her office. She has also introduced legislation, with Senator Richard Burr, Republican of North Carolina, to strengthen the supply chain.

“The hits just keep on coming in this pandemic in the supply chain,” said Dr. Jamie McCarthy, the chief physician executive at Memorial Hermann Health System, a large hospital group in Houston.

Health officials and doctors worry that the low supply and prolonged waits for tests will exacerbate earlier delays in care caused by the pandemic, when hospitals were overrun with Covid patients, they were facing sizable backlogs to get tests and elective procedures were canceled or postponed for months. Patients who overlooked troubling new symptoms or could not get follow-up appointments have suffered deteriorating health in many cases. Some doctors report more cancer patients with advanced-stage disease as a result.

“We continue to be concerned about the impact of the delayed, deferred or ignored screening over the last few years,” said Dr. William Dahut, the chief scientific officer for the American Cancer Society.

The lack of contrast dye in an exam can make it more difficult to diagnose cancer, he said, and can make it harder to see if a treatment is working. “Patients could be in a situation where clinical decisions are going to be negatively impacted,” Dr. Dahut said.

In addition to using contrast with a CT angiogram to determine whether patients have a blood clot or internal bleeding, doctors often rely on CT scans with contrast to spot infections, bowel blockages or cancers. Doctors are also delaying some cardiac catheterizations.

The shortage does not affect people undergoing mammograms and screenings for lung cancer because they do not require the imaging agents, and some patients may be able to have an M.R.I. in place of a CT scan or have the exam performed without contrast.

But for many others, the shortage leaves them in limbo. “It’s definitely causing more stress for patients,” said Dr. Shikha Jain, an oncologist in Chicago. “There are patients who are getting frustrated because scans are delayed or canceled.”

How long and to what extent the shortage will affect patient care is difficult to predict. For health care workers, for whom supply shortages and the pandemic have been so relentlessly taxing, “it feels like a never-ending marathon,” she said.

At Memorial Hermann, the system has “throttled back” its use of contrast for elective procedures, Dr. McCarthy said, to preserve its supplies. The daily volume of CT scans being performed with contrast is about half of what it normally is, he says.

At ChristianaCare, a Delaware-based hospital group, the supply depletion problem emerged in mid-May, and “became a serious issue very quickly,” said Dr. Kirk Garratt, the medical director for the group’s heart and vascular health center and a former president of the Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and

Interventions. When other area hospitals began running out of dye, they started sending patients to ChristianaCare. “It impacted our burn rate,” he said.

“We’re really worried here,” Dr. Garratt said. Explaining why elective procedures were being delayed, he added: “We feel we have to make this change now to ensure we have a supply so we can keep doing the urgent care we need.”

A patient who fails an exercise stress test that may indicate a heart problem but is not in imminent danger is likely to wait for a scan and be treated with medications. But if a patient enters the emergency room and is sweating, with severe chest pain, an angiogram requiring contrast dye is immediately ordered to determine whether the person is suffering a heart attack.

“We either fix that now, or in a few hours it will be too late to save you,” Dr. Garratt said.

Hospitals generally rely on a single supplier for their contrast agents, and many facilities may have only a week or two of supply on hand, says Dr. Matthew Davenport, vice chair of the commission on quality and safety for the American College of Radiology and a professor at Michigan Medicine.

He likens the situation to the current scarcity of baby formula, where only a handful of companies serve a critical market. “There is not a lot of redundancy in the system,” Dr. Davenport said.

GE Healthcare said in a statement on Monday that its supply of iodinated contrast media products was increasing, although it did not provide an estimate for when the shortage would end. “We are working around the clock to expand production and return to full capacity as soon as possible and in line with local authorities” in China, the company said.

“After having to close our Shanghai manufacturing facility for several weeks due to local Covid policies, we have been able to reopen and are utilizing our other global plants wherever we can,” the statement read.

GE Healthcare said the plant was operating at 60 percent capacity and would be at 75 percent within the next two weeks. It also said it had taken other steps like increasing production of the products at its plant in Cork, Ireland, and flying some shipments to the United States.

The company also said it was distributing the dye to hospitals based on their historical supply needs, which doctors said could prevent large hospital systems from stockpiling excessive amounts.

Bracco Imaging, the other producer based in Milan, said in a statement that it was working to deliver supplies even to hospitals that were not customers to shore up use for “critical emergency procedures,” according to Fulvio Renoldi Bracco, the company’s chief executive. In a statement, he said that Bracco had also submitted a request to the F.D.A. for the potential importation of an equivalent agent that had not been approved for use in the United States. The agency declined to comment on the request.

Nancy Foster, the vice president of quality and patient safety policy for the American Hospital Association, a trade group in Washington, likened the situation to the short supply of oxygen, among other treatment machines and remedies, during the pandemic. The group has urged G.E. to share more information about the shortage.

“We need to figure out how to really create a much more robust, not as lean, supply system that has some give to it,” she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Protected against monkeypox?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/health/monkeypox-vaccine-immunity.html
GIST	For a world weary of fighting the coronavirus, the monkeypox outbreak poses a key question: Am I at risk?

The answer is reassuring. Most children and adults with healthy immune systems are likely to dodge severe illness, experts said in interviews. But there are two high-risk groups.

One comprises infants younger than six months. But they are not yet affected by the current outbreak. And many older adults, the group most likely to succumb to the monkeypox virus, are at least somewhat protected by decades-old smallpox vaccinations, studies suggest.

[Vaccinated older adults may become infected](#) but are likely to escape with only mild symptoms.

“The bottom line is that even those that were vaccinated many decades before maintain a very, very high level of antibodies and the ability to neutralize the virus,” said Dr. Luigi Ferrucci, scientific director of the National Institute on Aging.

“Even if they were vaccinated 50 years ago, that protection should still be there,” he said.

In the United States, routine immunization for smallpox ceased in 1972. The military continued its vaccination program until 1991 as a precaution against a bioterrorism attack.

Questions about the smallpox vaccine’s durability rose after an anthrax attack in 2001, said Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the Biden administration’s top adviser on infectious diseases. It was reasonable to assume that most vaccinated people were still protected, he said, “but durability of protection varies from person to person.”

“We can’t guarantee that a person who was vaccinated against smallpox is still going to be protected against monkeypox,” Dr. Fauci said.

The monkeypox outbreak has grown to include about 260 confirmed cases and scores more under investigation in 21 countries.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is tracking nine cases in seven states, not all of which have a history of travel to countries where monkeypox is endemic. That suggests that there may already be some level of community transmission, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the agency’s director, told reporters on Thursday.

Dr. Walensky said that 74 laboratories in 46 states have access to a test that can detect monkeypox, and together they can screen up to 7,000 samples a week. The agency is working to expand that capacity, she said, adding: “We’ve been preparing for this type of outbreak for decades.”

Monkeypox infection begins with respiratory symptoms but blooms into a distinct rash, first in the mouth, then the palms of the hand and soles of the feet, and gradually the rest of the body. The rash eventually becomes raised, growing into pus-filled blisters.

Each pustule contains live virus, and a ruptured blister can contaminate bed linens and other items, putting close contacts at risk. Infected people should also be very careful about rubbing their eyes because the [virus can destroy sight](#).

“Before Jenner had developed the smallpox vaccine, the number one cause of blindness in the world was smallpox,” said Mark Slifka, an immunologist at Oregon Health and Science University. Infected people are contagious until the pustules scab over and slough off, he said.

Dr. Slifka and other experts emphasized that while monkeypox can be severe and even fatal, the current outbreak is unlikely to swell into a large epidemic.

“We’re lucky to have vaccines and therapeutics — things that can mitigate all that,” said Anne Rimoin, an epidemiologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, who has studied monkeypox in Africa. “We do have the ability to stop this virus.”

Monkeypox takes up to 12 days to cause symptoms, giving doctors a window of at least five days after exposure to vaccinate and forestall disease. (The approach, called post-exposure prophylaxis, is not an option for Covid patients because the coronavirus can start to ravage the body just a couple days after exposure.)

The monkeypox virus does not spread in the absence of symptoms. Careful surveillance, isolation of infected people, contact tracing and quarantine of contacts should contain the outbreak, Dr. Rimoïn said.

A majority of those infected currently are men under 50, and many identify as gay or bisexual, which may reflect the outbreak's possible origins at a Gay Pride event in the Canary Islands. (The outbreak could just as easily have started among heterosexual people at a large event, experts said.)

"The risk of exposure is not limited to any one particular group," Dr. Walensky said on Thursday. "Our priority is to help everyone make informed decisions to protect their health and the health of their community, and that starts with building awareness guided by science, not by stigma."

No deaths have been reported. But experts are particularly concerned about close contacts who are children, older adults or who have weak immune systems for other reasons.

There are conflicting opinions on how long immunity from a smallpox vaccination lasts.

The C.D.C. recommends boosters of smallpox vaccines every three years but only "for persons at risk of occupation exposure," David Daigle, a spokesman for the agency, said in a statement.

"Until we know more, we will be using available vaccine stocks for people who've had close contact with known cases, and people at highest risk for exposure through their jobs, like health care workers treating monkeypox patients," he said.

The United States and several European countries have begun immunizing close contacts of infected patients, an approach called ring vaccination.

Many of the most vulnerable groups may already be protected. In one study, Dr. Slifka and his colleagues drew blood from 306 vaccinated volunteers, some of whom had been immunized decades earlier, including one who had been immunized 75 years before. Most of them maintained high levels of antibodies to smallpox.

In another study, Dr. Slifka and his colleagues showed that antibodies produced by even a single dose of the smallpox vaccine decline very slowly in the body, dropping to half after about 92 years.

Dr. Ferrucci and his colleagues at the N.I.H., as well as other teams, have also found that antibody levels [persist for decades](#) after vaccination. [Some studies have found](#) that other branches of the immune system also wane slowly, but antibodies produced from [smallpox vaccination may be enough](#) on their own to protect against monkeypox.

If smallpox were to start spreading, it would make sense to immunize anyone who is exposed because of its high mortality rate, regardless of a previous vaccination, said Gigi Gronvall, a biosecurity expert at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

"We wouldn't want to take the chance that somebody was left unprotected," she said.

But that is not necessary now, she added: "This is monkeypox."

Laboratory evidence of antibodies does not prove that smallpox vaccination can protect against monkeypox. But answering that question would require that study participants be deliberately infected with smallpox or a related virus, an obviously unethical experiment.

For the same reason, newer smallpox vaccines and drugs have been tested only in animals.

Still, one way to study the vaccine's effectiveness in people is to gather evidence during an outbreak. Dr. Slifka's team did just that in 2003, when dozens of Americans became infected with monkeypox after being exposed to infected prairie dogs.

The researchers flew into Milwaukee and drew blood from 28 people who had been exposed to the infected prairie dogs. Of the eight people who had previously been vaccinated, five developed an average of three pus-filled blisters, compared with an average of 33 in those who were unvaccinated.

The other three vaccinated individuals [had no symptoms](#) at all. "They didn't even know they had been infected," Dr. Slifka said.

Another [study of that outbreak](#) found that in a family of three, the previously vaccinated father developed just two monkeypox lesions compared with 200 in the unvaccinated mother. Their unvaccinated 6-year-old daughter had about 90 lesions and was in a coma for 12 days.

Questions about the durability of vaccine protection against monkeypox have taken on particular significance as the number of cases worldwide has risen. Monkeypox re-emerged among people in Nigeria in 2017, and there have since been about 200 confirmed cases and 500 suspected cases.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has recorded 58 deaths and nearly 1,300 suspected cases since the beginning of this year.

People in African villages used to contract monkeypox from animals while hunting but rarely infected others. "It's only very recently, like, just the last few years, when we started to see this," Dr. Rimoin said of bigger outbreaks.

The eradication of smallpox, while one of the greatest achievements in public health, has left populations vulnerable to the virus and to its cousins.

Diminishing immunity, coupled with a rise in population and increased proximity to wild animals, may result in more frequent monkeypox outbreaks, Dr. Rimoin and her colleagues warned in 2010.

Unrestrained outbreaks, particularly among immunocompromised people, would give the virus more opportunity to acquire mutations that make it more resilient — in people and in animals.

"If monkeypox were to establish itself in a wildlife reservoir outside of Africa, the public health setback would be enormous," Dr. Rimoin said. "That, I think, is a legitimate concern."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 US won't yield to lift Russia sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/26/white-house-wont-lift-sanctions-despite-russian-pr/
GIST	<p>The White House said on Thursday it won't yield to Russian calls to lift sanctions over the war in Ukraine, as the Kremlin seeks to shift blame for a looming global food crisis.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin pressed world leaders on Thursday to lift the sanctions, claiming the West's penalties are blocking the export of millions of tons of grain and other agricultural products.</p> <p>White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. will not budge.</p>

	<p>“This is Russia’s doing,” she said. “Sanctions from the United States and its allies and partners are not preventing the export of Ukrainian or Russian agriculture including food and fertilizer, nor are they preventing the ordinary transactions that are necessary for these transactions.”</p> <p>Ukraine and Russia are among the world’s top producers of wheat, corn, and sunflower oil. Russia has mined many of Ukraine’s ports, blocking the export of critical food supplies.</p> <p>“This is Russia who is actively blocking exports from Ukrainian ports and who is increasing world hunger,” she said.</p> <p>Analysts fear the blockade has put the world on the brink of a food security crisis.</p> <p>The Kremlin also has argued that U.S. sanctions have hampered its own ability to export agricultural products. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has dismissed the Kremlin’s talking points, noting that food, fertilizer, and seeds are not subject to U.S. sanctions.</p> <p>Ms. Jean-Pierre said the solution to the crisis is in Russia’s hands.</p> <p>“This is on them,” she said. “Russia should immediately cease its war on Ukraine which is devastating food security and allow the free flow of Ukrainian food.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Uvalde struggles under a heavy cloud
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/27/these-are-innocent-babies-grief-loss-and-love-as-uvalde-struggles-under-a-heavy-cloud
GIST	<p>The grief is visible on almost every corner in Uvalde, Texas: in the faces of the school-aged kids who are no longer in the classroom and the mournful messages written on the backs of vehicles: “Annabell Rodriguez, daddy missing u”.</p> <p>Three days after a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers at Robb elementary, a loss and a sense of deep confusion hangs over this small ranching town like a shadow. “I feel a big heavy cloud right now,” said Jose Cazares, the uncle of Jackie Cazares, who died in the shooting. “It’s not the same.”</p> <p>The killings have touched nearly everyone in the community of 16,000 people, which is largely Latino, and left residents struggling to come to grips with what happened and support their bereaved friends and neighbors.</p> <p>“What do you say? What do you do?” said Justin Hill, thinking of a friend who lost their daughter in the shooting. “There aren’t enough words.”</p> <p>There is more movement than ever in Uvalde, with large vigils and memorials to honor the dead and journalists from around the world on seemingly every street, but life here, residents say, feels almost motionless.</p> <p>“It’s just still,” Hill said as he stood inside the Local Fix, a Uvalde coffee shop. “We have a lot of people coming into town; businesses are busy. But for the overall population, everything is different. It’s just waiting and watching.”</p> <p>This time of year is normally busy in the small south-western town, with high school graduation and summer activities. All have been postponed. The area recently got rain, which would usually send people to the river, Hill said, but no one seems interested in water recreation.</p> <p>The local Walmart was uncharacteristically empty after the shooting, Hill added, and local businesses closed early or shut down entirely. “That’s how close people in this community are. They are willing to drop everything to do what they can to help.”</p>

People have started returning to the Walmart, picking up free bouquets to leave along the 21 crosses that surround the town square. Inside the store, children fiddle with toys and adults greet their neighbors in quiet voices. In the sympathy card aisle, under the section for bereaved parents, there are no more cards.

Even for those not directly connected to the school, the loss feels personal. “It feels as if it’s our child, as if it’s our kids or our nieces or nephews,” Alex Covarrubias said.

Countless people have visited the memorial set up around the town square, some from San Antonio, Lubbock and Laredo, and others from just down the street.

PJ Talavera came to the memorial with his daughter and wife, and soon they were embracing grieving friends. “I’ve hugged no less than maybe 200 or 300 people in the last 24 hours,” he said. “One thing that I can tell you for sure, is there’s an enormous amount of love.”

‘You can still feel it in the air’

Talavera, who runs a local martial arts studio, is familiar with many of the names on the crosses that line the fountain in the square – he mentored and taught several of them at an after-school program at Robb elementary. “There are too many,” he said, gazing at the crosses. “These are just innocent babies.”

His martial arts school has stayed open since the tragedy, if not for classes than just to provide a normal routine to his students. “They need to do something. They’re just here and this is just too much. We need to shelter them.”

Covarrubias said he had grown tired of sitting home and watching the news, so on Wednesday he headed down to the town square and held up a sign reading, “Prayers for the families”.

“I’m kind of glad I don’t have a job because I just couldn’t imagine going to work every day right now,” he said. “You can still feel it in the air.”

Elisa Gonzalez, who used to live in the area, came to pay her respects and was heartened to see the way residents cared for one another. “They’re still together like they always are,” she said.

Also at the memorial were family members of those who died, like Jose Cazares, who stood under the trees and remembered his niece, Jackie, the “little firecracker”.

“She was motivated, she was loving. Full of love. A spark in her eye all the time,” he said. “She loved taekwondo, singing, dancing. She liked going to the river, shopping with her tía [aunt].”

When Cazares came into town to visit, she always offered to give up her room so that he would stay close instead of at a hotel. Jackie greeted everyone with a big hug, and a big heart, her aunt added. The family consoled one another and received support from their friends like Talavera.

But they also expressed frustration, as questions mount about how the gunman was able to carry on his rampage for almost an hour. “It took them 45 minutes to do what? Nothing,” said Cazares about the law enforcement officers who had responded to the scene. “I heard the governor say that he advocated half a billion dollars for school safety. Why wasn’t that school safe? They need to be held accountable – the school, the PD, the governor.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 PCSD active-shooter drills in schools
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/pierce-county-prepares-school-shooting-lockdown/281-166f4c68-c19f-4545-9ac4-3e8f34b9a8c6
GIST	TACOMA, Wash. — As the fallout from one of the deadliest school shootings in US history continues, the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department (PCSD) is working to keep school buildings as safe as possible.

That means extensive preparation, and learning from past tragedies.

“One of the things that we learned from Columbine is that they did their emergency drill, which was get under the table and hide and that doesn’t work, and unfortunately that was one of the reasons why so many people were hurt,” said PCSD Spokesperson Sgt. Darren Moss.

For over a decade, school resource officers have been running active shooter drills in schools, training students and staff to use different options that range from running away, fighting the shooter, or hiding.

“When you or I were in school, we didn’t have to do these drills, when our parents and grandparents were in school, they didn’t have to do these drills,” Moss said. “But it’s such a common occurrence that they have to know what to do to protect themselves.”

But mental health counselor Latonya Littleton says that while she sees the value of preparation, the drills can take a toll on the mental and emotional well-being of the students she works with.

“For some students, they feel safer because they know what to do. And sometimes, the teachers provide reassurance of what their role is when there’s an active shooter,” she said. “And for others, there’s a level of fear, because some of them have not really been exposed to the idea that there could be a school shooting and this is an introduction of what could actually happen to them.”

Sgt. Moss says he’s seen how traumatizing this all can be, but also says it’s critical that schools and law enforcement are prepared because doing nothing simply isn’t an option.

“I’ve been in some of these schools when they do these drills and some of the kids are actually terrified,” Moss said. “The other option is to not prepare and wait for somebody else to do something or make a new law or figure out a different way to solve the problem. Until we find out a solution to the problem, the sheriff’s department and our schools need to be ready to act when something bad happens.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Blaine schools cancel classes for 2nd day
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/blaine-schools-threat/281-83664ec3-2389-4c54-929e-1536ea0da141
GIST	<p>BLAINE, Wash. — The Blaine School District canceled classes for Friday after a student received threats on Wednesday, prompting an hours-long lockdown of the main campus.</p> <p>It's the second day classes were canceled.</p> <p>Multiple agencies responded to the Blaine school campus around 2:20 p.m. after a student received threats through a text message from an unknown source, according to a joint statement from the school district and the Blaine Police Department (BPD).</p> <p>The student received additional threats that "escalated in seriousness and indicated a person was in the school with a weapon," according to the statement.</p> <p>The campus includes a primary school, elementary, middle, and senior high school.</p> <p>Around 5 p.m., the BPD tweeted all Blaine schools had “been cleared and are safe,” and the school district would begin releasing students to their families.</p> <p>The Blaine school campus was placed in lockdown out of "an abundance of caution,” police said. There were no reported injuries.</p> <p>Some students in grades six through 12 were initially evacuated to the Boys & Girls Club and released to families. All remaining students were moved to the stadium as police cleared buildings.</p>

	<p>"Despite the chaos and difficulty of this day, we are all incredibly grateful for the partnership between our school district and police department. Most of all we are grateful for the safety of our community's children," the joint statement reads.</p> <p>The district said it has been in communication with the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction about the incident.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Olympia free RV encampment parking
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/olympia-the-first-to-permit-free-rv-encampment-parking-on-public-street
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - Olympia is trying something no other city in the region has done: allowing permit-based RV encampment parking on a city street.</p> <p>For years, Ensign Road near St. Peter's Providence Hospital has been a de facto RV encampment. As of Thursday, nearly 40 motor homes, campers and trailers are parked along the public street—almost every one of them has received a parking permit from the city that allows them to stay indefinitely, as long as they follow a set of conditions.</p> <p>"We are changing this zone, and I'm giving out the permits" said Kim Kondrat, Olympia's Homeless Response Coordinator. She scoffs at the idea of being Olympia's 'RV parking czar,' but she will be handling the permits. If occupants don't follow the rules, she takes the permit.</p> <p>"I've been homeless out here in Olympia for 15 years now," said Wayne, who received a permit. "I really appreciate all that Olympia is doing for us."</p> <p>City crews are in the middle of moving RVs, running or not, to temporary locations, so garbage can be removed and the street cleaned.</p> <p>"It's a fresh start," said Kondrat. "It's a reset for everyone. We haven't tried anything like this before."</p> <p>The permit is temporary and can be revoked at any time at the discretion of the City of Olympia.</p> <p>Everyone responsible for an RV or vehicle must agree in writing to several conditions. Vehicles and RVs can not obstruct travel lanes, bike lanes, sidewalks, dumpsters, or fire hydrants. Vehicles that do are subject to immediate tow.</p> <p>Dumping or discharging sewage, trash or any other substance—like oils, auto fluids and paint—is prohibited. Any illegal, violent, threatening, or aggressive acts will result in the immediate revocation of the permit.</p> <p>Items are not to be stored outside a designated parking space accept:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cooking appliance • 1 complete bicycle per person (no bike parts) • 2 two storage bins with tight-fitting lids • 1 generator • Up to 2 accessory propane tanks and mobility devices <p>In a twist on existing parking laws, if the RV is abandoned or has moved away from the permitted parking space for 72 hours or more, the permit becomes void.</p> <p>Olympia law says if an RV stays in one spot for more than 24 hours, it can be ticketed and towed. A requirement of the Ensign Road permit is for its occupants not to move—unless they plan to leave the area permanently.</p>

"With all this garbage and everything, I can see why the city is disgusted by it, I'm disgusted by it," said Joshua, who also received a permit. "[I] don't really want to be around here, but this is where I've ended up."

Kondrat said there is very limited supply of overnight shelter space and services she and her four-person team can offer.

The permitted parkers can have their sewage tanks pumped out by the city once a month. There will be multiple port-a-potties and dumpsters along the road.

If people don't comply with the conditions and refuse to leave, Kondrat said the RV could be towed, but won't be impounded if they declare it's their only home. A 2021 Washington Supreme Court ruling said cities could not impound a vehicle and put it up for auction if its occupants declare it to be their home, and they can't pay the fines.

"We are not taking their home, they are just not allowed to park here," said Kondrat.

The encampment has been an issue for its nearest neighbor, St. Peter's Providence Hospital for years," said Angela Maki, spokesperson for Providence's South Puget Sound Region.

"We hope the permit system limits or stops growth for this difficult situation. We have been advocating for a few years with the city of Olympia and Thurston County on a compassionate solution and an end to the encampment on Ensign.." she said.

"I think it's a great idea, I really do," said Zack, another trailer owner who received a permit. "That way we can keep track of everybody coming through here."

The permitted parking goes into effect immediately and is not available anywhere else in Olympia.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Delta cuts flights to 'relieve pressure'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/delta-cuts-flights-to-relieve-pressure-17-sea-tac-flights-canceled-friday/
GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg</i> - Delta Air Lines is cutting flights just ahead of the busy Memorial Day weekend and through the summer to help it recover faster from bad weather, higher-than-expected worker absences and other issues that have rattled recent operations.</p> <p>The airline said it will trim about 100 flights a day in the U.S. and Latin America from July 1 through Aug. 7 to help bolster reliability for remaining flights. Delta said additional adjustments could be made, hinting at possible further reductions. The nearer-term cancellations for the upcoming holiday weekend, initially disclosed in a memo sent to employees late Wednesday, are designed "to relieve pressure by proactively thinning the schedule over Memorial Day and through the balance of June."</p> <p>As of Thursday afternoon, Delta had canceled 17 flights previously scheduled to land at or depart from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Friday, according to FlightAware.com. Delta is the second-busiest airline at Sea-Tac by passenger volume, trailing Alaska Airlines, which has also seen cancellations surge this spring.</p> <p>Delta has prided itself on its relatively low cancellation and flight-delay rate compared with other carriers but the last-minute decision to slash its schedule shows how precarious the ability to staff flights has become. Nearly all U.S. carriers cut initial second-quarter capacity, with some trimming into the third quarter, as they struggled to balance surging demand with a pilot shortage.</p> <p>Weather, vendor staffing and air traffic control issues, along with higher-than-expected absences among some airline work groups, are affecting Delta's operations "more than any time in our history," said the</p>

memo from Chief of Operations John Laughter and Allison Ausband, the chief customer experience officer.

Packed planes over the summer could make it difficult for airlines to move thousands of stranded passengers to other flights. It could take several days for some travelers affected by the latest Delta cuts to reach their destination, Robert Mann, president of consultant R.W. Mann & Co., said in an interview.

“It’s consistent with what we’ve seen by others in the industry; it’s just late in the game,” Mann said. “It’s really late in the game if you’re flying over the Memorial Day weekend. It’s embarrassingly late for that.”

Delta’s latest reductions account for about 2% of its scheduled flights during the July through early August period. It will follow a planned cut in second-quarter capacity by 16% from 2019 levels. United Airlines expects a 13% decline while American Airlines will be down as much as 8%.

Delta declined to update its full second-quarter capacity plans. The airline is canceling flights over the holiday weekend at least 24 hours ahead of time, with 60 flights affected Thursday and 40 so far for Friday, a spokesperson said.

The prospect of being stranded in a distant airport may deter some would-be travelers from booking a summer getaway far from home.

“There’s no way to sugar coat the re-accommodation challenge,” said Samuel Engel, senior vice president of the aviation group at consultant ICF. “It’s not just that the Delta system is at high load factors. It’s that the remaining open seats are on the wrong flights, such as flights home from the beach Friday night. Some Delta passengers should be thinking about firing up the barbecue at home instead.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Homebuyers in WA face new shock
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/cost-of-mortgage-payments-climbing-washington-among-the-worst-in-the-nation/
GIST	<p>Here’s one more sign of Washington’s difficult housing market: Monthly mortgage payments are on the rise.</p> <p>The median monthly payment for a new mortgage in Washington hit nearly \$2,800 last month, according to new data from the Mortgage Bankers Association. That’s \$811 higher than the same time last year and more than \$1,000 higher than in April 2019, before the pandemic, another illustration of the way struggling buyers can become locked out of home ownership.</p> <p>Even as the housing market began to show signs of cooling this spring, homebuyers across the country faced higher costs.</p> <p>Nationwide, the median payment hit \$1,889, up \$153 from March and up about \$569 from last April.</p> <p>The median payment was \$1,374 for loans backed by the Federal Housing Administration, up \$374 from last April. Those loans allow lower down payments for first-time homebuyers.</p> <p>Home prices skyrocketed after the start of the pandemic, when demand for homes picked up as white-collar workers went looking for home offices, more millennials reached homebuying age, and rock-bottom interest rates made more people want to buy. At the same time, housing markets across the country faced a shortage of homes for sale.</p> <p>Now, home prices remain high and mortgage interest rates are rising, amid inflation.</p> <p>The average interest rate on a 30-year mortgage stands at 5.1%, according to Freddie Mac. That rate is lower than during much of the past 50 years, but up 2.15 points from this time last year.</p>

“Mortgage payments are taking up a larger share of homebuyers’ incomes, and sky-high inflation is making it more difficult for some would-be buyers to save for a down payment or come up with the additional cash they need to afford a higher monthly payment,” said Edward Seiler, an associate vice president at the Mortgage Bankers Association, in a statement.

Throughout the Seattle area, mortgage payments are up most in the Eastside areas where home prices have exploded, such as Sammamish, Woodinville, Mill Creek and Redmond, according to separate data from Zillow.

Outlying areas in Pierce County have seen payments increase, too, such as an area just south of Puyallup where the payment is up about 53%, or \$859 per month, compared to last year, according to Zillow.

Washington borrowers saw the third-highest median payment in the nation in April, behind only California and Hawaii, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association.

The Mortgage Bankers Association also compares payments and incomes to see how much of a typical person’s income is eaten up by the payments, then scores each state based on the ratio. The higher the number, the worse the affordability. Last month, Washington had the seventh highest score in the nation. Idaho had the highest.

The two data sets are calculated differently. The MBA gets mortgage information from a survey of banks and compares the costs of new mortgage payments with weekly earnings data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Zillow estimates mortgage payments based on the price of a typical home in a given area, assuming a buyer has a down payment of 20% and gets a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage.

Soaring monthly costs don’t hit everyone equally.

For many Washington homebuyers, high and rising incomes help account for higher housing costs. Local tech giants Amazon and Microsoft have both said they will increase pay, with Microsoft pointing to “the impact of inflation and rising cost of living.”

But the region’s expensive housing — for renters and buyers — makes it harder for many others to stay in the area.

And, because of historical racism in housing and structural inequities, higher housing costs disproportionately affect people of color, especially Black people, who face lower homeownership rates and higher homeownership costs, and are more likely than white renters to be cost-burdened (meaning they pay more than a third of their income toward rent).

Research from the Urban Institute and MIT in 2020 found that Black homeowners pay higher mortgage rates, insurance premiums and property taxes, due in part to risk policies in the mortgage process that can disadvantage people with lower down payments and lower credit scores.

According to the MBA’s estimates, from March to April, affordability worsened by 12.1 points for Black homebuyers, 11.9 points for white buyers and 11.3 points for Hispanic buyers.

Meanwhile, median rent for a new lease on a one-bedroom apartment in Washington is \$1,303, up \$184 a month from last April, according to Apartment List. In Seattle, the median one-bedroom rent last month was \$1,586, up \$220 per month.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/wa-parents-struggling-with-baby-formula-shortage-as-murray-schrier-promise-follow-up-action/
GIST	<p>Ines Santos recently drove from her home in Bonney Lake to Everett to find two cans of baby formula for her son, desperate to keep him fed amid a nationwide formula shortage, she said. That's a 120-mile round trip through Pierce, King and Snohomish counties.</p> <p>"Families are suffering," Santos said Thursday on a Zoom call with U.S. Sen. Patty Murray and U.S. Rep. Kim Schrier about the shortage that started after manufacturer Abbott Nutrition had products recalled due to health concerns and shut down a major plant in Michigan, exacerbating other supply-chain problems. "Families should not have to go through this."</p> <p>Murray and Schrier hosted the call to share updates about the crisis, which has generated political heat. Both are Democrats up for reelection this year; Schrier's cross-mountain district, which stretches from Sammamish to Wenatchee, includes Bonney Lake.</p> <p>"I know people are angry, and I am, too," said Murray, who heads the Senate's health committee and questioned the Food and Drug Administration response in a hearing Thursday, blaming manufacturers and the agency for allowing shelves to go bare.</p> <p>There have been positive steps, Murray said, with President Joe Biden invoking the Defense Production Act to speed formula manufacturing and launching an effort to ship formula from overseas. The Senate approved and Biden signed legislation last week waiving restrictions on what types of formula parents can buy using Women, Infants and Children benefits.</p> <p>"But there is a lot more that needs to be done," added Murray, after pressing the FDA's commissioner on why the agency hasn't yet rolled out a plan to improve its food safety program.</p> <p>Schrier plans to introduce legislation that would establish an "early-warning system" for formula shortages, like an existing system for medications, she said. She also mentioned the possibility that formula could be added to the national stockpile of medical supplies.</p> <p>Parents are still struggling to find formula and are having to switch types, which can be hard for babies, Santos said. Paying for gas while searching eats up money for groceries, she added.</p> <p>When this crisis began, White Center Food Bank employees had to throw away about 1,000 pounds of recalled formula, executive director Carmen Smith said. That was devastating, she said. The food bank has been able to distribute Enfamil formula since then but not Similac, an Abbott brand that many babies are used to, Smith said.</p> <p>Washington's WIC program, which serves about 53,000 babies, has added dozens of formula options, according to the state Department of Health. Families not finding what they need in stores can ask WIC staff to procure formula and have it shipped to a local clinic, said Michele Roberts, assistant secretary for prevention and community health. The department has launched a special webpage for baby formula help, available at doh.wa.gov.</p> <p>Also on Thursday, King County Councilmember Reagan Dunn, one of several Republicans competing to challenge Schrier, said he was proposing legislation that would direct the county to explore ways to procure and distribute formula, including bulk purchasing.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Sound Transit extends 'fare ambassador'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/sound-transit-extends-fare-ambassador-program-lowers-price-of-reduced-fares/
GIST	The Sound Transit board of directors voted Thursday to extend its "fare ambassador" program, which is intended to put a more welcoming face on fare enforcement, through at least the end of this year. The

board also voted to reduce the cost of fares for low-income riders from \$1.50 to \$1 and extend its participation in a program to provide free passes to people with very little income.

Both votes are continuations of a yearslong effort to overhaul fare policies to make the system more equitable and less punitive. The board already voted last month to increase the number of warnings given to riders and make it less likely lack of payment would land someone in court.

The changes come as Sound Transit seeks to increase the number of low-income riders signed up for ORCA passes, and amid data showing [enforcement has historically landed disproportionately](#) on Black riders.

The board pushed forward with the changes despite a dramatic decline in fare revenue in the past two years, corresponding with depressed pandemic-era ridership, and concerns, raised most vocally by outgoing CEO Peter Rogoff, about an increase in nonpaying riders. Some board members raised the question of whether the new system could lead to fewer people paying while others hypothesized that compliance would increase with ridership.

Sound Transit began piloting its fare ambassador program in August 2021. The goal was to put a friendlier foot forward on fare enforcement, a task previously given to contracted security. Ambassadors are to provide more education and make riders aware of alternative ways to resolve fare disputes other than paying a fine.

So far, however, the program has struggled with lack of staff: Sound Transit staff estimate a rider will take 23 rides before running into an ambassador, on average. Under the new system, staff hope to decrease that to every seven rides, with an “aspirational” goal of every three rides.

The decision to reduce low-income fares to \$1 from \$1.50 is part of an effort to get 80% of all riders eligible for reduced rates signed up for an ORCA pass. Sound Transit estimates 39% currently are signed up.

In addition to the reduced fare, the board authorized new spending to educate the public about who’s eligible for subsidized passes.

For those with very little to no income, the board opted to extend a program to provide free passes. There are currently 10,000 people signed up.

Several board members wanted to delay the price reduction in order to try to better coordinate with other transit agencies that use ORCA. “I don’t understand this at all,” King County Councilmember and Sound Transit board member Claudia Balducci said of the choice to move forward Thursday. She and fellow King County Councilmember Dave Upthegrove wanted to continue their discussions with King County Metro about the reduction.

But the board opted to move forward, saying the price reduction was especially relevant now as enforcement increases.

“I don’t want the work to go off and just die,” said board Chair Kent Keel.

Of Sound Transit’s sizable overall budget, around 6% is supposed to come from fare collection. The board set a goal of covering up to 40% of operating costs through fares, but achieved that only in 2017. Since the beginning of the pandemic, that has plummeted to 5%. Staff recently revised down total revenue forecasts through 2046 to just over \$6 billion from \$9 billion before the pandemic.

Calls to make fares free have gained momentum recently, particularly in the wake of 2020’s protests, but Sound Transit has so far not seriously considered taking that step.

HEADLINE	05/26 Seattle neighborhood in 'tactical urbanism'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/seattle-residents-painted-their-own-crosswalk-the-city-scraped-it-off/
GIST	<p>When the crosswalk at 83rd and Greenwood showed up last September, it didn't look like all the others. Rather than the piano key pattern used by the Seattle Department of Transportation — staccato bars of white paint, separated in pairs of two — this one was a series of large, evenly spaced white blocks.</p> <p>It didn't look like the others because this crossing was painted in the middle of the night, without city approval. By whom is unclear; no one's claimed credit and those who may have an inkling either can't or won't say.</p> <p>While its beginnings are unknown, its ends are not: SDOT scraped the guerrilla crosswalk off the street earlier this month.</p> <p>Spokesperson for SDOT, Ethan Bergerson, said the city plans to install a permanent crossing there, which is part of a designated bike route to and from Green Lake. It will include signage and traffic signals, and installation should begin in the next several months, he said.</p> <p>But residents of Greenwood say they've been told for years now a crossing was coming but have yet to see any progress. It was originally supposed to be built in 2021, but delays related to COVID-19 and the supply chain, as well as labor being diverted to the West Seattle Bridge, pushed it down the road. It's for this reason that, while he doesn't love individuals bypassing community input and had his own questions about the crosswalk's safety, Greenwood resident Rob Fellows can understand why someone would take matters into their own hands.</p> <p>"It's impatience," he said. "It's a form of activism — let's get this thing going, let's change the city's priorities. It's well meaning. The people who put it out there were trying to do something good for the neighborhood, I don't have any question about that."</p> <p>There's a name for when community members make unsanctioned changes to city-owned streets: "tactical urbanism."</p> <p>"Tactical urbanism to me is essentially what a fed-up citizenry takes into their own hands when it comes to their own safety on their streets and sidewalks," said Ben Scott, a Greenwood resident who's documented the saga of the 83rd Street crosswalk.</p> <p>Acts of tactical urbanism pop up occasionally in Seattle. A similar crosswalk appeared in South Seattle sometime in the summer of 2020. Clara Cantor, a community organizer with Seattle Neighborhood Greenways, noticed it on walks with her newborn. A year later, that, too, was scratched off, with SDOT telling her it didn't meet city specifications.</p> <p>Forrest Baum, an environmental studies student at the University of Washington who's involved with Greenwood-Phinney Greenways, pointed to another form of tactical urbanism: the large concrete blocks businesses have laid in Ballard and near the Ship Canal to keep people living in RVs from parking long-term.</p> <p>Los Angeles had its own version of the Greenwood episode as well; a group painted four crosswalks at an intersection before the Los Angeles Department of Transportation removed them.</p> <p>The intersection at 83rd is in the heart of Greenwood, next to Coyle's Bakeshop. It's also part of a neighborhood greenway — a route labeled for bicyclists — following 83rd from Green Lake to First Avenue Northwest.</p> <p>People cross at 83rd whether there's a crosswalk or not, said Scott, but when one arrived in September, he said cars seemed to slow in a way they hadn't before and no longer blocked the curb ramp as they dashed into Coyle's for a pastry.</p>

“It was one of those things that, when it popped up, a lot of people were like, ‘Oh, great, how exciting that that’s here,’ ” said Ryan DiRaimo, an architect and housing advocate who lives in the area. “That’s what I thought was really intriguing about it, but at the same time I wondered when they would scrape it off.”

SDOT built a crosswalk on 84th, one block to the north, but Scott said that crossing is illogical for bike riders following the 83rd route.

“The suggestion that you should use a different crossing than the one that makes sense for your path is one that we ascribe to pedestrians and bikers only,” he said.

Baum said his kindergartner has begun riding his bike recently. Baum liked that the crosswalk could slow traffic through Greenwood. “I thought it was really useful as far as someone who’s walked across there and biked that way,” he said.

But Fellows, who works in transportation and supports putting a crosswalk at the intersection, had concerns that this one may create safety issues. “The paint isn’t reflective, there’s no stop signs, there’s no notice to drivers that things are going to be different there,” he said.

There were likely liability concerns as well, he said. “If you’re a traffic person, you spend half your life in tort claim court.”

The life span of the crosswalk was roughly eight months. Bergerson with SDOT said it didn’t meet the department’s standards but said the installation of traffic signals should begin this year. “We’re working to get the word out to the public,” he said. It won’t arrive tomorrow, he added. “It just takes some time.”

Baum said he wouldn’t have minded its removal if it had been immediately paired with a specific plan for its replacement. Absent that, “even though it’s this sneaky tactical thing, I think taking away something that people feel is an asset to the community is going to rub some people the wrong way,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 NY school vaccine mandate survives
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/new-york-school-vaccine-mandate-survives-as-supreme-court-rejects-appeal/
GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg</i> - The U.S. Supreme Court turned away a challenge to New York’s requirement that schoolchildren be vaccinated against serious diseases, refusing to question the state’s 2019 repeal of its longstanding exemption for families with religious objections.</p> <p>The justices without comment left in place a state court ruling that said New York wasn’t targeting religion when it eliminated the exemption after the worst measles outbreak in a quarter century. The vaccine requirement applies to children under 18 in both public and private schools.</p> <p>The rebuff is consistent with the Supreme Court’s handling of cases involving COVID-19 vaccines. The justices have let state and local government impose shot requirements even without the type of religious opt-out the court has required in other contexts — for example, with regard to Obamacare’s contraceptive mandate.</p> <p>A group of parents challenged the 2019 repeal, saying it violated their rights under the Constitution’s First Amendment and was driven by anti-religious bias. They faulted the state for removing the religious exemption while allowing other people — including students over 18, adults who work for schools and children with medical exemptions — to go unvaccinated.</p> <p>The parents said they were forced to either violate their religious beliefs or home-school their children. “The results are devastating — tens of thousands of children have been deprived the ability to attend school without violating their sincerely-held religious beliefs,” the parents argued.</p>

New York first required schoolchildren to be vaccinated in 1860. It's currently one of six states — along with California, Maine, Mississippi, West Virginia and Connecticut — not to have a religious opt-out, according to the challengers.

New York officials urged the Supreme Court not to hear the appeal, saying the vaccination rules are religiously neutral and serve an important public-health function. The state said the rate of religious exemptions had increased by 65% over the previous several years, with some schools granting opt-outs to more than 20% of their students.

The state Legislature “was motivated by a singular purpose: to protect the public health by increasing vaccination rates,” New York Attorney General Letitia James argued in court papers.

A New York state appeals court upheld the repeal. The state's highest tribunal, the Court of Appeals, refused to take up the case, clearing the way for the appeal to the US Supreme Court.

The case is *F.F. v. New York*, 21-1003.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Racial disparities in baby formula shortage
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/baby-formula-shortage-highlights-racial-disparities/
GIST	<p>COLUMBIA, Md. (AP) — Capri Isidoro broke down in tears sitting on a chair at the office of a lactation consultant.</p> <p>The mother of two had been struggling to breastfeed her 1-month-old daughter ever since she was born, when the hospital gave the baby formula first without consulting her on her desire to breastfeed.</p> <p>Now, with massive safety recall and supply disruptions causing formula shortages across the United States, she also can't find the specific formula that helps with her baby's gas pains.</p> <p>“It is so sad. It shouldn't be like this,” said Isidoro, who lives in the Baltimore suburb of Ellicott City. “We need formula for our kid, and where is this formula going to come from?”</p> <p>As parents across the United States struggle to find formula to feed their children, the pain is particularly acute among Black and Hispanic women. Black women have historically faced obstacles to breastfeeding, including a lack of lactation support in the hospital, more pressure to formula feed and cultural roadblocks. It's one of many inequalities for Black mothers : They are far more likely to die from pregnancy complications, and less likely to have their concerns about pain taken seriously by doctors.</p> <p>Low-income families also face a particular struggle: They buy the majority of formula in the U.S. Experts fear small neighborhood grocery stores that serve these vulnerable populations are not replenishing as much as the larger retail stores and that some of these families do not have the resources or means to hunt for formula.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 20% of Black women and 23% of Hispanic women exclusively breastfeed through six months compared to 29% of white women. The overall rate stands at 26%. Hospitals that encourage breastfeeding and overall lactation support are less prevalent in Black neighborhoods, according to the CDC.</p> <p>The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses also says Hispanic and Black women classified as low wage workers had less access to lactation support in their workplaces.</p> <p>The racial disparities reach far back in America's history. The demands of slave labor prevented mothers from nursing their children, and slave owners separated mothers from their own babies to have them serve as wet nurses, or women who breastfeed other women's children.</p>

In the 1950s, racially targeted commercials falsely advertised formula as a superior source of nutrition for infants. And studies continue to show, Black mothers are more likely to receive in-hospital formula introduction than white mothers, which happened to Isidoro after her emergency cesarean section.

Physicians say introducing formula means the baby will require fewer feedings from his mother, decreasing the milk supply as the breast is not stimulated enough to produce.

Andrea Freeman, author of the book “Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race and Injustice,” said these mothers still aren’t getting the support they need when it comes to having the choice of whether to breastfeed or use formula. They also may have jobs that do not accommodate the time and space needed for breastfeeding or pumping milk, Freeman said.

“Nobody’s taking responsibility for the fact that they’ve steered families of color toward formula for so many years and made people rely on it and taken away choice. And then when it falls apart, there’s not really any recognition or accountability,” Freeman said.

Breastfeeding practices are often influenced by previous generations with some studies suggesting better outcomes for mothers who were breastfed when they were babies.

Kate Bauer, an associate professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, said she began hearing back in February about Black and Latino families in Detroit and Grand Rapids feeling stuck after finding smaller grocery stores running out of formula.

Some were told to go to the local office of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, better known as WIC, the federal program that supports low-income expectant and new mothers. Between 50% and 65% of the formula in the U.S. is bought through the program.

“Going to the WIC office is like a full day’s errand for some moms,” Bauer said.

She also said she fears mothers are getting desperate enough to try foods that are not recommended for babies under 6 months.

Yury Navas, a Salvadoran immigrant who works at a restaurant and lives in Laurel, Maryland, says she was not able to produce enough breast milk and struggled to find the right formula for her nearly 3-month-old baby Jose Ismael, after others had caused vomiting, diarrhea and discomfort.

One time they drove half an hour to a store where workers told them they had the type she needed, but it was gone when they got there. Her husband goes out every night to search pharmacies around midnight.

“It’s so hard to find this type,” she said, saying sometimes they have run out before they can secure more formula. “The baby will cry and cry, so we give him rice water.”

On a recent day, she was down to her last container and called an advocacy group that had told her it would try to get her some at an appointment in five days. But the group could not guarantee anything.

Some mothers have turned to social media and even befriended other locals to cast a wider net during shopping trips.

In Miami, Denise Castro, who owns a construction company, started a virtual group to support new moms during the COVID-19 pandemic that has now also started helping moms get the formula they need.

“Most of the moms we have been helping are Black and Latinas,” Castro said, adding many of them are back to work. “These moms really don’t have the time to visit three to four places in their lunch hour.”

	<p>Castro said one of the women they have been trying to help is a Hispanic teacher who is back at work and does not have much flexibility between her job and caring for her 2-month-old infant, who has been sensitive to a lot of formula brands.</p> <p>Lisette Fernandez, a 34-year-old Cuban American first-time mother of twins, has relied on friends and family members to find the liquid 2-ounce bottles she needs for her boy and girl. Earlier this week, her father had gone to four different pharmacies before he was able to get her some boxes with the tiny bottles, but they run out quickly as the babies are growing.</p> <p>Fernandez said she wasn't able to initiate breastfeeding, trying with an electric pump but saying she produced very little. Her mother, who arrived in Miami from Cuba as a 7-year-old girl, had chosen not to breastfeed her children, saying she did not want to, and taken medication to suppress lactation.</p> <p>Some studies have attributed changes in breastfeeding behavior among Hispanics to assimilation, saying Latina immigrants perceive formula feeding as an American practice.</p> <p>"Over the last three to six weeks it has been insane," Fernandez said. "I am used to everything that COVID has brought. But worrying about my children not having milk? I did not see that coming."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Senegal: 11 babies killed in hospital fire
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/president-11-babies-killed-in-fire-at-senegalese-hospital/
GIST	<p>TIVAOUANE, Senegal (AP) — Police were on guard and nearby residents and parents stood mourning outside a hospital in Senegal where a fire in the neonatal unit killed 11 newborns. Only three infants could be saved, President Macky Sall said before calling on Thursday for three days of mourning for the young lives lost.</p> <p>Mamadou Mbaye, who witnessed the fire Wednesday at the Abdoul Aziz Sy Dabakh Hospital in Tivaouane, a town 120 kilometers (75 miles) northeast of the capital, Dakar, told The Associated Press that conditions inside the hospital were "atrocious."</p> <p>"It was hot and smoky inside with a suffocating heat, and there was a power outage," Mbaye said. Grieving parents were still in shock.</p> <p>"I baptized my child on Wednesday and he was baptized here in the hospital. To my great shock, I got a call to tell me that the neonatal section had been destroyed by a fire," said Badara Faye, who lost his son.</p> <p>Moustapha Cisse, who also lost a newborn, said they are still awaiting answers on how such a tragic fire could take the lives of their children.</p> <p>The fire was blamed on an electrical short circuit, according to Mayor Demba Diop.</p> <p>Interior Minister Antoine Diome announced that authorities would be opening an investigation into the condition of the hospital's facilities as well as other health care centers, Senegalese media reported. President Sall called for three days of mourning.</p> <p>"To their mothers and families, I express my deepest sympathy," Sall had tweeted upon hearing the news of the fire.</p> <p>His chief of staff, minister Augustin Tine, visited the remains of the hospital Thursday.</p> <p>"We have come to be close to the people, in particular the parents," he said. We have come to share the suffering, he added, "to share our condolences and to say again it is a misfortune that has hit our country, but we keep our faith."</p>

	<p>The deadly fire comes a year after four other newborns died in a hospital fire in Linguere in northern Senegal.</p> <p>A series of other deaths also have raised concerns about maternal and infant health in the West African nation known for having some of the best hospitals in the region.</p> <p>Earlier this month, authorities discovered a baby that had been declared dead by a nurse's aide was still alive in a morgue. The infant later died.</p> <p>Last year a pregnant woman died in Louga, in the north of the country, after waiting in vain for a cesarean section. Three midwives were given six-month suspended sentences for not giving help to a person in danger.</p> <p>Health Minister Abdoulaye Diouf Sarr, who was attending the World Health Assembly in Geneva, cut short his trip to return to Senegal.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Dominant variant: omicron, delta combo
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-science-health-united-states-pandemics-72462053f8d60fd548cf34377864100b
GIST	<p>The coronavirus mutant that is now dominant in the United States is a member of the omicron family but scientists say it spreads faster than its omicron predecessors, is adept at escaping immunity and might possibly cause more serious disease.</p> <p>Why? Because it combines properties of both omicron and delta, the nation's dominant variant in the middle of last year.</p> <p>A genetic trait that harkens back to the pandemic's past, known as a "delta mutation," appears to allow the virus "to escape pre-existing immunity from vaccination and prior infection, especially if you were infected in the omicron wave," said Dr. Wesley Long, a pathologist at Houston Methodist in Texas. That's because the original omicron strain that swept the world didn't have the mutation.</p> <p>The omicron "subvariant" gaining ground in the U.S. — known as BA.2.12.1 and responsible for 58% of U.S. COVID-19 cases last week — isn't the only one affected by the delta mutation. The genetic change is also present in the omicron relatives that together dominate in South Africa, known as BA.4 and BA.5. Those have exactly the same mutation as delta, while BA.2.12.1 has one that's nearly identical.</p> <p>This genetic change is bad news for people who caught the original omicron and thought that made them unlikely to get COVID-19 again soon. Although most people don't know for sure which variant caused their illness, the original omicron caused a giant wave of cases late last year and early this year.</p> <p>Long said lab data suggests a prior infection with the original omicron is not very protective against reinfection with the new mutants, though the true risk of being reinfected no matter the variant is unique to every person and situation.</p> <p>In a twist, however, those sickened by delta previously may have some extra armor to ward off the new mutants. A study released before it was reviewed by other scientists, by researchers at Ohio State University, found that COVID patients in intensive care with delta infections induced antibodies that were better at neutralizing the new mutants than patients who caught the original omicron.</p> <p>"The omicron infection antibody does not appear to protect well against the subvariants compared to delta," said Dr. Shan-Lu Liu, a study author who co-directs the viruses and emerging pathogens program at Ohio State.</p>

But Liu said the level of protection a delta infection provides depends partly on how long ago someone was ill. That's because immunity wanes over time.

People who got sick with delta shouldn't think of themselves as invulnerable to the new subvariants, especially if they're unvaccinated, Long said. "I wouldn't say anyone is safe."

One bright spot? Booster shots can provide strong protection against the new mutants, Liu said. In general, vaccines and prior infection can protect people from the worst outcomes of COVID-19. At this point, scientists say, it's too early to know if the new mutant gaining ground in the U.S. will cause a significant uptick in new cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Scientists are still trying to figure out how virulent these new mutants are. Long said he hasn't seen anything that answers that question for him, but Liu said emerging data points toward more serious illness. Liu said the subvariants have properties suggesting they spread more efficiently cell-to-cell.

The virus "just hides in the cell and spreads through cell-to-cell contact," Liu said. "That's more scary because the virus does not come out for the antibody to work."

Dr. Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute, said the new mutants certainly don't appear less virulent than previous versions of omicron, and whether they are more virulent or not "will become clear in the months ahead."

In the meantime, scientists expect the latest powerhouse mutants to spread quickly, since they are more transmissible than their predecessors.

Though home testing makes it tough to track all U.S. COVID cases, data from Johns Hopkins University shows that cases are averaging nearly 107,000 a day, up from about 87,000 two weeks ago. And new hospital admissions of patients with COVID-19 have been trending upwards since around mid-April, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"I'm hopeful that we don't see a similar increase in hospitalizations that we've had in prior waves," Long said. "But with COVID, any time you have lots of people being infected, it's just a numbers game. Some of those people are going to be severe. Some of those people are going to need hospitalization. Some of them, unfortunately, are going to pass away."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Seattle population drops, Redmond rises
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/while-seattles-population-declined-another-king-county-city-saw-fastest-growth-in-wa/
GIST	<p>Seattle, the fastest-growing big city of the last decade, is now losing population.</p> <p>The Census Bureau released population data Thursday for all U.S. cities, towns and places. It shows that from July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021, at the peak of the pandemic, Seattle had a net loss of nearly 4,300 people, which represents a decline of 0.6%.</p> <p>The city's population now stands just shy of 734,000, and Seattle remains the 18th most-populous city in the nation. The last time Seattle's population declined was between 2002 and 2003, when the city lost a modest 200 people.</p> <p>It's strange feeling for me to write about Seattle losing population. I've covered these Census Bureau releases in my column since 2013, when Seattle suddenly became the fastest-growing big city in the nation. For six consecutive years, Seattle ranked in the top 2 for the rate of growth. And in the 2019 to 2020 period, before the effects of the pandemic were captured in the data, Seattle was No. 1 again.</p>

Even so, I was sure this news was coming. In March, the Census Bureau released population figures for U.S. counties, and it showed that [King County had its first population decline in nearly 50 years](#). The county lost around 20,000 people from July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021, but the data didn't tell us how much of the loss came from Seattle. Now, with this new data release, we know it was about 4,300.

The new Census Bureau release doesn't include any data on what caused population changes, such as changes in domestic and international migration, or in the number of births and deaths. But we do have that information for each county, and it shows that more people left King County than moved in, and that migration from other countries greatly reduced from the pre-pandemic period. The number of births declined and the number of deaths increased, which was surely due in part to COVID-19.

Seattle was hardly alone among major U.S. cities in losing population during this period. Even before the pandemic took hold, growth in many cities was slowing in recent years. In the period from 2019 to 2020, 15 of the largest U.S. cities lost population. The new data shows 32 shrank from 2020 to 2021.

Seattle's drop in population was relatively small. Many of our "peer" cities had even larger declines, including Portland, Denver, Boston and Washington, D.C. And San Francisco was in a league of its own, losing an astonishing 6.4% of its population (a decline of close to 50,000 people). New York had the biggest numeric loss at 305,000.

The big city with the fastest growth was Fort Worth, at 1.4%. Another Texas city, San Antonio, had the largest numeric growth, increasing by about 13,600.

Not including Seattle, King County shrank by a little more than 1% — nearly twice Seattle's rate of 0.6%. Indeed, a number of King County cities had significant declines in population last year. Bellevue shrank by about 2,400, a loss of 1.6%. Kent, Federal Way and Renton all had population losses of more than 1,500.

Even so, the state's fastest-growing city, among those with at least 50,000 people, was also in King County.

Redmond increased its population by about 2,900, an impressive 4% growth rate. Microsoft's hometown has been among the fastest-growing cities in the state for several years. In fact, in 2019, Redmond ranked as the 10th-fastest-growing city in the nation, among those with at least 50,000 people. In the new data, Redmond's ranked 25th in the nation.

Among Washington's small cities and towns, the fastest growing was also in King County. Black Diamond, about 30 miles southeast of Seattle, grew by 20% in 2021, an increase of nearly 1,000 people. Black Diamond is home to a large new master-planned community called Ten Trails, which is being built in phases. This community, which opened in 2018, will eventually include roughly 6,000 homes, bringing more than 15,000 people to Black Diamond.

The other larger cities in Seattle's metro area, Tacoma and Everett, both had small population declines.

Elsewhere in Washington, the larger cities of Spokane and Vancouver had modest growth. Spokane Valley grew by a healthy 2%, and in doing so surpassed Renton as the eighth-most-populous city in Washington.

Just as Seattle is perennially Washington's biggest city, the state's smallest town also has no real competition. The population of Krupp in Grant County was 47 last year, unchanged from 2020.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Lakewood PD settles forceful arrest
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/lakewood-to-pay-75k-to-woman-whose-arm-was-broken-in-2-places-by-police-during-arrest/

GIST

The city of Lakewood will pay \$75,000 to a woman whose arm was broken in two places when police officers attempted to remove her from a market where she was having a mental health crisis, an incident similar to an earlier misdemeanor arrest in which one of the officers broke another woman's arm.

Young Choi suffered a permanent disability after a bone in her right arm was shattered during her 2018 arrest, according to court documents. A loud "crack" — followed by Choi's agonized scream — was captured on video taken by a bystander.

Records in U.S. District Court in Seattle indicate that one of the officers involved, David Butts, was sued in 2016 after he pulled a woman out of a car by her hair and took her to the ground following a traffic stop, breaking her wrist and causing other injuries. That case was settled after a judge concluded there were questions about whether Butts and other officers used "objectively unreasonable force" in that arrest.

The city of Lakewood, its Police Department and the attorney who defended the lawsuit did not reply to phone messages Tuesday. Choi's Seattle attorney, Christopher Carney, said it's his understanding Butts has left the Lakewood Police Department.

Choi said in a sworn declaration that she has bipolar disorder and was "suffering a manic episode" when she entered Lakewood's Pal-Do World Market to purchase produce Feb. 21, 2018. She said she began loudly complaining about the quality of the produce, confronting store employees and customers, and then become more upset when another patron began to record the commotion on a cellphone. Management called police. Two officers, Butts and Brian Luttrull, responded.

The bystander's video shows Choi walking around the store barefoot, confronting workers and other customers. At one point she takes an employee's cellphone and won't return it, pushing the other woman and playing keep away as the woman reaches for the device.

Two officers arrive, and one of them — identified in court documents as Luttrull — quickly grabs Choi by the hand and wrist and begins pulling her toward the store entrance. Choi resists and pulls away, yelling "I need my purse!"

Both of the officers are much larger than Choi, who is 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighs 130 pounds, according to court documents.

"Neither officer made any effort to reassure me that my purse would be safe or that they would get it for me," Choi wrote in her sworn declaration filed with the court. "Because I was afraid to lose my purse, I tried to pull in that direction.

"Defendant Luttrull resisted me, yanking on my left arm to pull me back toward him," Choi wrote. "Because I was afraid, I swung my right arm at Defendant Luttrull's arms, which were both gripping my left arm by this point.

"Luttrull immediately yanked me facedown to the ground and began to use his weight to immobilize me," Choi wrote. "Defendant Butts joined ... also piling his weight on me."

Choi said she suffered an abrasion and cut to her forehead from hitting the floor.

"That made me squirm in pain and fear, but I was otherwise immobilized," she wrote. "While ... Luttrull held my left arm still, Defendant Butts pressed down on my torso and yanked my arm behind my back.

"I suddenly felt an unbearable pain and heard a repulsive snapping sound from my right arm," Choi wrote.

An audible "crack" can be heard in the video footage, as Choi's right humerus — the long bone between the shoulder and elbow — fractures in two places.

“At this point I was in agony, and my right arm was entirely useless,” she said in her declaration. “Still, the defendants completed the handcuffing process by twisting my broken arm behind my back.”

Court documents indicate that Choi needed surgery to repair the fractures and state that she suffered “permanent damage.”

In an order denying Lakewood’s motion to dismiss the case, U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan said Luttrull’s actions were justified because Choi had resisted him, taken an employee’s cellphone and assaulted the employee by shoving her into a display. Butts’ actions, however, raise constitutional questions, the judge wrote.

“Plaintiff has pointed to sufficient issues of fact, if believed, to find that Officer Butts violated her Fourth Amendment rights when he broke her arm during the course of this arrest,” Bryan wrote.

Bryan was the judge who also presided over the 2016 lawsuit filed against Butts and two other Lakewood officers by Renata Gardner, who was a passenger in a car driven by her husband when he was pulled over for speeding.

The officers decided to arrest Gardner’s husband, who was allegedly driving on a suspended license, and impound the vehicle despite Gardner’s request that she be allowed to drive it home because she needed it for her job.

Gardner claimed Butts pulled her from the car by her hair and slammed her to the ground, resulting in a deep scalp laceration, permanent hair loss and a broken wrist. She was arrested and charged with obstruction and resisting arrest. Those charges were later dismissed, court records show.

In his order denying the city’s motion to dismiss Gardner’s lawsuit, Bryan wrote that while the officers were justified in arresting Gardner, a jury should decide whether the officers used excessive force in doing so.

Details of the settlement in Gardner’s case were not immediately available.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Edmonds criminalizes public homelessness
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/edmonds-passes-law-criminalizing-homelessness-in-public-spaces-but-lacks-local-shelter-options/
GIST	<p>People living on Edmonds’ streets may soon be given a choice: bus to a shelter up to 35 miles away or risk a fine of up to \$1,000 with a possibility of jail time.</p> <p>The Edmonds City Council passed an ordinance last Tuesday making it illegal to occupy or store belongings in public places overnight, part of both a regional and national trend of local governments criminalizing visible homelessness. Edmonds’ ordinance is unusual in that its enforcement requires relying on social services outside city limits.</p> <p>Mercer Island passed a similar law banning camping in public places last year, a month before Everett passed a “no sit, no lie” ordinance. Auburn followed suit, turning a civil infraction for public camping into a criminal penalty.</p> <p>In Edmonds, city officials say the measure is partly preemptive, aimed at keeping what residents see as the growing homelessness crisis in Seattle out of their city. There are at least 450 homeless people living in Edmonds, according to the city’s latest assessment; 117 of them are students. City officials say there are 10 to 20 people sleeping outside on any given night.</p> <p>Edmonds’ ordinance states the city cannot enforce its camping ban against a homeless person unless there is available shelter within 35 miles of Edmonds City Hall.</p>

City Council President Vivian Olson said the ordinance was introduced because of a few cases in recent years when a single individual created an outsized disturbance. She said the city offered those people shelter, but when they refused, police had no way to remove them by force.

“I don’t agree that this is criminalizing homelessness. If anything, we’re criminalizing not accepting the support and help when we’re offering it,” Olson said. “There will be people who will refuse literally everything, no matter how perfect.”

But there is no homeless shelter within Edmonds.

Edmonds’ shelter offerings include five long-term motel vouchers, all of which are currently in use, and a \$6,000 to \$7,000 budget to purchase short stays at a motel. The city has allocated around \$300,000 to work with Snohomish County to build a shelter that includes supportive services, but has not yet identified a building to purchase, and did not provide a timeline for when that project will be completed.

Olson said that Edmonds could also rely on shelters in other cities in the meantime. The YWCA in Lynnwood, the only shelter in south Snohomish County, serves only women and children. The closest shelter available to men in Snohomish County is in Everett, almost 20 miles away.

Mary Anne Dillon, executive director of YWCA Snohomish County, said Edmonds reached out to her organization last summer when it was trying to house a person. She told the city the waiting list for an overnight bed in the shelter was 60 to 90 days.

“The need for shelter far exceeds the resources in our community,” Dillon told council members in April. “When there are no shelter beds available, it defeats the very purpose of the ordinance. So I would urge you to consider other strategies, expanded shelter options and more permanent solutions before passing.”

That’s the same recommendation that Edmonds’ own Homelessness Task Force, which Dillon is a member of, offered to the city.

Edmonds’ strategy for enforcing its camping ban could open it up to potential lawsuits, according to Eric Tars, legal director at the National Homelessness Law Center.

Under a 2018 federal court decision known as *Martin v. Boise*, local governments are prohibited from criminalizing homeless people camping in public spaces when there is no shelter that is “practically available.” That term leaves room for interpretation, but Tars said Edmonds transporting people up to 35 miles away across city limits pushes that definition.

“If Edmonds wants to roll the dice with the courts and defend this ordinance using taxpayer dollars to do so, I guess that’s their choice, but it wouldn’t be my recommendation,” Tars said.

City of Edmonds spokesperson Kelsey Foster said in an email that when enforcing its ordinance, the city would “evaluate the needs of a particular person experiencing homelessness before determining whether a shelter space can be considered ‘available’ to that person.”

From 2006 to 2019, the number of laws in cities nationwide prohibiting camping nearly doubled, according to the National Homelessness Law Center. Tars said that number has grown even more since the pandemic.

“What we’re seeing is a reaction to the growth of homelessness, and primarily the growth of unsheltered homelessness,” Tars said.

The homeless population in Snohomish County has increased 42.8% since 2015, according to the county’s latest Point-in-Time count, a biennial homelessness census.

Weeks of heated discussion and public testimony led up to the Edmonds City Council's 5-2 vote on the camping ban.

Councilmember Laura Johnson proposed an amendment that would have required the city to build a shelter program before the ordinance could go into effect. Her proposal failed 5-2.

Many residents spoke in favor of the ordinance. They described encounters with homeless people in Seattle where they felt unsafe, and several said they moved to Edmonds to leave that behind.

"Don't put people who are having problems at the top of the pyramid and ignore the citizens who are here and pay taxes and support the city government," said Edmonds resident Bill Herzig.

Another resident, Dan Murphy, said the city's ordinance did nothing to address what he said was the root cause of homelessness, the rising cost of housing. The median home price in Edmonds is over \$900,000.

"It seems like the council and the city's just taking the easy way out," Murphy said. "Let's kick the unfortunate people out of town. Let's get them out of sight out of mind so we can go on with our lives.' And to me, that's not the way."

The King County Regional Homeless Authority agrees that Edmonds' new ordinance is not an effective strategy for dealing with homelessness. With Edmonds just 4 miles away from King County and not having any shelters of its own, the authority said it was concerned that could cause spillover effects into King County, which is also dealing with a shortage of shelter options.

Edmonds police Chief Michelle Bennett said that while officers would not enforce the ordinance if shelter options weren't available, they would inform people staying outside of the new ordinance.

"It would be made known that in the city of Edmonds, there is no public camping overnight," Bennett said.

That message has already been received by some of the homeless people in Edmonds. Brad Peterson, 51, has been staying in a wooded area behind a grocery store parking lot, but since hearing about the new law, he says he'll be leaving soon.

"Makes me feel a little embarrassed, you know," Peterson said. "I don't want to stick around and get in trouble."

Peterson has long blond hair that's graying at the edges. He attended Edmonds College studying music and says he came back because "there's a lot of good people."

He sits on the sidewalk next to Highway 99 with a sign that reads, "Hungry, Help, \$10/hr labor." He used to work in construction, but an injury left him unable to work full time. He became homeless two years ago.

A lot of cities have been cracking down on homeless people, Peterson said. Since September, he has been arrested at least three times in Washington for trespassing or activities related to camping so he says Edmonds' new ordinance doesn't surprise him.

"It's like, 'OK, push them all out. Push all the homeless away.' And it's like, I can't think of the words and I don't want to say anything really mean, but it's kind of fearful," Peterson said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 CDC: 9 monkeypox cases in 7 states
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/26/health/monkeypox-cdc-update/index.html
GIST	The US Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention has identified nine monkeypox cases in seven states as of Wednesday, Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a news briefing on Thursday.

Cases have been identified in Massachusetts, Florida, Utah, Washington, California, Virginia and New York.

All of the cases “are within gay, bisexual men and other men who have sex with men,” she said.

Walensky called for an approach “guided by science, not by stigma.”

US is offering vaccines to certain people exposed to monkeypox. Here's what you should know
“This is a community that has the strength and has demonstrated the ability to address challenges to their health by focusing on compassion and science,” she said in an apparent reference to the AIDS epidemic.

“While some groups may have a greater chance of exposure right now, infectious diseases do not care about state or international borders. They’re not contained within social networks and the risk of exposure is not limited to any one particular group,” she warned.

Walensky implored Americans “to approach this outbreak without stigma and without discrimination.”

The CDC is working to learn more about the outbreak: Samples from the nine identified cases were sent to the CDC for additional confirmatory testing and genomic investigation, Walensky noted, and there are efforts to learn how each individual contracted the virus.

Some of the nine cases have a recent history of international travel to areas with active monkeypox outbreaks, she said, but “others do not.”

The US expects more cases to be diagnosed as the CDC has urged doctors and Americans to be on the lookout for symptoms.

“We shouldn’t be surprised to see more cases reported in the US in the upcoming days. It’s actually a sign that Americans are remaining vigilant, and healthcare providers and public health workers are doing their job,” said Dr. Raj Panjabi, White House senior director for health security and biodefense.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Court okays greenhouse gas cost estimates
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/us/politics/supreme-court-greenhouse-gas-emissions.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court said on Thursday that it would allow the Biden administration to continue to take account of the costs of greenhouse gas emissions in regulatory actions, rejecting an emergency application from Louisiana and other Republican-led states to block the use of a formula that assigns a monetary value to changes in emissions.</p> <p>The court’s brief order gave no reasons, which is typical when the court acts on emergency applications. There were no noted dissents.</p> <p>The case concerned an interagency working group created by President Barack Obama that in 2010 announced a framework for assessing the costs of greenhouse gas emissions. President Donald J. Trump disbanded the group, and President Biden revived it.</p> <p>In an executive order issued in January 2021, Mr. Biden instructed the group to develop “estimates of the monetized damages associated with incremental increases in greenhouse gas emissions.”</p> <p>“An accurate social cost is essential for agencies to accurately determine the social benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions when conducting cost-benefit analyses of regulatory and other actions,” the order said.</p>

In February 2021, the group published interim estimates that were identical to those in place in 2016, adjusted for inflation. Louisiana and other states sued, saying the group's actions had not been authorized by Congress and had not followed administrative procedures.

Judge [James D. Cain Jr.](#) of the Federal District Court in Lake Charles, La., agreed, [issuing a sweeping preliminary injunction](#) prohibiting the federal government from using the working group's estimates. Judge Cain was appointed by Mr. Trump.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in New Orleans, [stayed Judge Cain's injunction](#) while the Biden administration's appeal moved forward. In an unsigned opinion, a unanimous three-judge panel wrote that the states were likely to lose. "The plaintiff states' claims are premised solely on the broad use of the interim estimates," the panel wrote. "They do not challenge any specific regulation or other agency action."

The panel added that the states had not suffered the sort of direct injury that gave them standing to sue. "The interim estimates on their own do nothing to the plaintiff states," the panel wrote.

The members of the panel were Judge [Leslie H. Southwick](#), who was appointed by President George W. Bush, and Judges [James E. Graves Jr.](#) and [Gregg J. Costa](#), who were appointed by Mr. Obama.

Louisiana asked the full Fifth Circuit, which has a conservative reputation, to rehear the case. The court turned down the request, noting that no judge had requested a vote on the matter.

In urging the Supreme Court to step in, Louisiana's emergency application said that "the estimates are a power grab designed to manipulate America's entire federal regulatory apparatus through speculative costs and benefits so that the administration can impose its preferred policy outcomes on every sector of the American economy."

The working group, the application said, was "an agency created out of whole cloth to issue what might be the most significant rule in American history."

[In response](#), Elizabeth B. Prelogar, the solicitor general, wrote that presidents "have for many years considered the social cost of greenhouse gases — that is, the net total of the costs and benefits attributable to the emission of gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide into the atmosphere."

She added that federal agencies were not required to use the monetary values assigned to particular greenhouse gases, though many chose to do so.

The lawsuit from Louisiana and the other states was premature, she wrote.

"If and when an agency relies on those estimates in issuing a rule or taking other reviewable action that injures the applicants," Ms. Prelogar wrote, "they may challenge that particular final agency action and argue that its reliance on the estimates renders it unlawful."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Bodies secretly removed from sunken ship?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/26/media-report-russia-secretly-removed-bodies-sunken/
GIST	<p>Russian forces conducted a secret mission to remove bodies from the cruiser Moskva, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet that was sunk in mid-April by a Ukrainian missile strike, according to a media report.</p> <p>Ukraine's military intelligence claims that Russia carried out a two-week salvage operation involving seven vessels following the sinking.</p>

	<p>“It comes amid a new claim that young naval sailors were ‘left to drown’ while ‘officers fled the ship like rats,” according to Great Britain’s Daily Mail.</p> <p>Ahead of Memorial Day surge, McConnell slams Biden for saying gas prices are ‘incredible transition’ The estimate of casualties in the Moskva sinking varies from a single death reported by Russian officials in Moscow to as many as half of the ship’s 500 sailors, as reported by Ukrainian military analysts.</p> <p>“They retrieved the bodies, removed all the equipment that was classified, and cleansed this cruiser,” Vadym Skibitskyi, a spokesman for the Ukrainian Defense Ministry’s main intelligence directorate, told the Daily Mail.</p> <p>Some family members of the Russian sailors have accused the government of staging a cover-up of the sinking and its high death toll.</p> <p>“There were no rescue efforts. Officers fled the ship like rats (and) the sailors were abandoned,” said Dmitry Shkrebetis, a father of one of the missing sailors, according to the Daily Mail.</p> <p>“Want to know why there were no badly wounded sailors from the Moskva? Because they sank them together with the cruiser,” he said, according to the Daily Mail.</p> <p>He vowed that Russian President Vladimir Putin will “answer personally” for what happened to his son, Yegor, and the other sailors aboard the Moskva.</p> <p>“He is used to lying,” Mr. Shkrebetis said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Students walk out, protest gun violence
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/tacoma-seattle-students-walk-out-class-protesting-gun-law-reform/SCG3ASKH45BHLGQNMFF56WG3QM/
GIST	<p>Students across western Washington walked out of class to protest gun violence and school shootings. Kids say they are sick of having to feel afraid while in the classroom.</p> <p>Today, about 100 students from Robert Eagle Middle School held a sit-out, then marched outside. Students at Foss High School in Tacoma also organized a protest, holding up signs and chanting for several hours outside the school.</p> <p>“What do we want? Gun control! When do we want it? Now!,” students chanted on the sidewalk outside of Foss High School.</p> <p>Students say the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, that killed 19 elementary school student has reignited their fears of dying while at school.</p> <p>“These 9-year-old kids shouldn’t be dying, they have the brightest future in the world,” said Keoni Pugal, a student at Foss High School.</p> <p>“We shouldn’t just have to worry about going to school just to get shot,” said Heaven Young, another student.</p> <p>“Why should kids have to be scared to live their life?” Brooklyn Hatcher, another Foss student, said.</p> <p>Some high school seniors say they still remember the deadly school shooting that happened in the halls of Foss High School 15 years ago. One student was killed.</p> <p>“In 2007 there was shooting at Foss and my brother was here,” Young said.</p>

One student who was at the protest on Thursday is an exchange student from Italy.

“It’s not normal in Europe. Yesterday my mother called me, she was almost crying. She asked me, ‘When is school going to finish, because you don’t have to go to school anymore?’” Liborio Pali said. “The U.S. should change a lot of things, because this is crazy,” he said.

Students say they’re frustrated. They see one mass shooting after another, but little change on a national scale when it comes to gun laws.

“I just wish we can make a difference in some type of way,” Hatcher said.

“You protest so many things, you know what I’m saying?” said Andrea Tillman, another student. “It’s like what more can we do?” she said.

Meanwhile, some are asking for more systems of protection at school, like metal detectors.

“Yes, absolutely, we need it,” Young said.

“Checks to make sure nobody is walking in with any type of weapons,” said another student at the protest.

They’re hopeful lawmakers will see their protests and listen, when it comes to gun reform.

“We might be a small community, but we are trying to make a big impact,” Pugal said.

Students at Foss say they’re planning to organize another protest for next week.

Organizers nationwide are planning for a massive march in Washington D.C. called “March for our Lives” on June 11.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Russia military eyes old equipment, troops
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dgnyb/russian-military-readies-60-year-old-tanks-and-civilian-boats-as-war-drags-on
GIST	<p>Russia is bringing Cold War era tanks out of storage and looking to draft civilian ships into the military as its war in Ukraine drags on and losses pile up.</p> <p>Observers first noticed the Russian T-62 tanks, first deployed in 1961, moving through the Melitopol railway station in southeast Ukraine. This is a Russian occupied territory near the frontlines where fighting is currently the heaviest.</p> <p>On May 23, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine mentioned the presence of T-62 as part of a briefing it posted on Facebook. “As a result of losses during hostilities, Russian enemy was forced to withdraw from storage T-62 tanks to recruit reserve battalion tactical groups that are being formed to be sent to Ukraine,” the post said.</p> <p>Russian armor has been no match for Ukrainians using Javelins and other anti-tank weapons provided by the U.S. and NATO. Russia’s more modern T-72s, T-80s, and T-90s have been destroyed in the hundreds since it pushed deeper into Ukraine in February. The Kyiv Independent has counted more than 1,300 destroyed Russian tanks.</p> <p>Independent open-source intelligence investigators have visually confirmed 700 of those losses.</p> <p>It’s a massive amount of lost tanks. Many have been felled by Javelins, Byraktar drone strikes, and other Ukrainian anti-tank weapons. Some were lost to incompetence. Russia lost an entire battalion trying to cross the Siverskyi Donets River earlier in May. As the Russian war machine was bogged down in the</p>

river, Ukraine struck at them with artillery. Moscow lost around 70 tanks and 400 soldiers [trying to cross a river](#).

Sanctions have made it difficult for Russia to acquire the materials it needs to produce more tanks so it's dusting off the old ones it has in storage. First deployed in 1961, the T-62 has been used in Russia's wars in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and now Ukraine. Like newer models, it also has weaknesses that make it a good target for loitering munitions and won't fare better than the machines Russia has already lost.

But beggars can't be choosers. As Russia dusts off its old tanks it also looks to fishing vessels and icebreakers to fill out its Navy. As spotted by [The Barents Observer](#), the Russian Navy is updating its [military doctrine](#) with an eye towards mobilizing non-military vessels. "Fundamentally new provisions of the doctrine relate to mobilization training and mobilization readiness in the field of maritime activities," said a translation of a Russian government website.

"This will make it possible to introduce civilian ships and crews into the Navy, to ensure the functioning of maritime infrastructure in wartime." The Russian Navy has also fared badly during the war with Ukraine. Ukraine, a country with no Navy, destroyed the *Moskva*, Russia's [flagship](#) in the Black Sea.

The dusting off of 60 year old tanks and the eyeing of civilian ships for the Navy are signs that the fight against Ukraine isn't going well for Russia. They're also signs that the Kremlin has no intention of giving up the fight anytime soon. Russia is gaining ground slowly in east Ukraine and fighting has slowed. Moscow is losing men and equipment, but is moving swiftly to replace both.

On May 25, the Russian Duma voted to [eliminate](#) the upper limit for military recruitment. Previously 40, now any male over the age of 18 can serve in the Russian military. Moscow has also been increasingly reliant on [mercenaries](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Covid-19 headed to seasonality?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-seasonal/story?id=84977829
GIST	<p>COVID-19 may indeed become a seasonal illness with predictable patterns of infection -- but it's not there yet, epidemiologists and infectious disease experts say.</p> <p>While the virus has had some element of seasonality since it first came into the world more than 2 years ago, other factors -- including variant evolution, population immunity, and behavioral changes -- have made seasonality less apparent.</p> <p>The disease may fall into a more predictable rhythm once the population has more immunity and as people go back to their pre-pandemic lives, but this will likely take a few years, most experts agreed.</p> <p>"There have just been so many other factors that have been driving spread, that seasonality hasn't been the major factor yet," Dr. Amesh Adalja, of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in Baltimore, told MedPage Today. "But as the population becomes more immune, and people go back to some semblance of what their ordinary life was pre-pandemic, I think the seasonality will become more apparent."</p> <p>Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, noted that the U.S. has seen significant COVID activity in multiple seasons, sometimes with major peaks, such as what occurred with Delta in the late summer and early fall of 2021.</p> <p>Surges, he said, "have really been tied more to when variants occur."</p> <p>Add to that the fact that immunity against infection wanes for both the previously infected and the vaccinated, Osterholm said, and that makes COVID surges much less predictable than the virus the world has wanted it to become since the beginning -- influenza.</p>

Hoping for flu's predictability

The hope around COVID having "seasonality" may have something to do with flu's predictability, experts said. Each year, the U.S. can expect relatively low mortality and morbidity -- anywhere between 12,000 and 60,000 deaths, and 140,000 and 810,000 hospitalizations, according to the CDC.

But it's just not possible to "fit the square peg of SARS-CoV-2 into the round hole of influenza just yet," said Dr. James Lawler, of the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Global Center for Health Security in Omaha.

Looking for insights into SARS-CoV-2 evolution in influenza's pattern of shifting and drifting isn't possible because they're "vastly different viruses," he noted.

Influenza drifts frequently, requiring annual vaccination, but it shifts -- developing larger changes that can lead to more virulent, pandemic influenza causing greater mortality -- less frequently.

"With influenza, you get swapping of different segments that creates massive differences in surface protein," Lawler said. "SARS-CoV-2 doesn't have the capability for such large-scale reassortment. However, it is very slippery, and it mutates rapidly."

"Whether you call it shift, or drift, or continuous evolution of the virus, it doesn't seem to be slowing down," he added.

Experts agreed that evolution of SARS-CoV-2 actually appears to be accelerating, given what's been observed with the evolution of variants in the Omicron family.

"If you look at South Africa, the rate of new epidemic waves have shortened since the beginning of the pandemic," Lawler said. "They had the Omicron surge in November/December, and now, 5 months later, they have a BA.4/5 surge."

That could indicate that variants will evolve at a more rapid rate, which may not correlate with the seasons. That's happening now in the northeastern U.S., where BA.2.12.1 has started to take off, and is contributing to a surge that was not seen this time last year.

"Right now, we have a highly infectious virus, and we have waning immunity," said Dr. Ali Mokdad, of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington in Seattle. "So people are susceptible to the virus even in summer."

That doesn't necessarily mean we'll see more virulent disease or, if making the maligned comparison to flu, a big "shift" that causes a huge surge in hospitalizations and death, Adalja said. Evolution would likely favor more transmissible or more immune-evasive variants, but not a variant that "keeps people in bed," he said.

"A person in bed is a lost opportunity to infect people," he noted. "You want people at school or work."

In addition, substantial T-cell immunity from prior infection or vaccination, he added, should continue to protect against severe disease.

"I don't think that immune-evasive variants can erase all the protection that the immune system gives you," he said. "It might be able to get around some of the protection that antibodies confer and cause infections, but to cause severe disease is a much higher ask."

If the Alpha variant was a "shift" from the original strain, Delta a shift from Alpha, and Omicron a shift from Delta, Adalja said, it's possible Omicron may represent a transition to "drift," which could make it behave more like the four other coronaviruses that currently circulate in the U.S.

Learning from other coronaviruses

Those four viruses have seasonality and may be a better model for the future of COVID-19 in the U.S., Adalja said. They circulate throughout the year at relatively low levels, but cause peaks of infection in the winter months, as substantial parts of the country head indoors to escape the cooler weather.

"We've already seen some element of seasonality [with SARS-CoV-2], but it's not as evident as it is with the other four coronaviruses that circulate every year," he said. "That may be due to the fact that until recently, there was very little immunity in the population, and that maybe prevented the stark seasonality from being apparent."

Those coronaviruses are also capable of reinfecting people, he noted. That means SARS-CoV-2 is most likely "going to continue to evolve and continue to become immune evasive in order to reinfect us, just like other members of the coronavirus family do."

Lawler agreed, pointing out that the comparison could have helped health officials better temper expectations around COVID vaccines.

"We do not have lifelong immunity to any of these coronaviruses, and that probably should have given us a pretty good clue that we were not going to achieve that with SARS-CoV-2, either from natural infection or from vaccination," he said. "We should have been prepared for this phenomenon of having to get periodically boosted."

"If we had messaged this well from the beginning," he added, "maybe it wouldn't have been such a big deal to people."

In March, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said she anticipated that COVID would "probably" become a seasonal virus.

There's no doubt over the last two years that the U.S. saw its highest peaks in winter, in early to mid-January in both 2021 and 2022.

Most experts agree that COVID-19 may be headed toward seasonality. They're just not prepared to say so, definitively, as SARS-CoV-2 has thrown so many curveballs in the past.

Osterholm noted that six months ago, Omicron had not yet hit U.S. shores.

"We've never seen this subvariant activity with Alpha, Beta, or Delta, so who could have predicted six months ago where we'd be at?" he said. "That's the challenge we have."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Congo: M23 rebels attack military base
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/congos-m23-rebels-attack-military-base-countrys-east-84994691
GIST	<p>KINSHASA, Congo -- Congo's army defended a major military camp in the country's east on Thursday after days of fighting with M23 rebels making advances in the region.</p> <p>Clashes continued at the Rumangabo base in the Rutshuru area of North Kivu province about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the provincial capital, Goma.</p> <p>"There is no truce. The fighting is still continuing this morning on the same fronts as yesterday," deputy army spokesman Gen. Sylvain Ekenge said.</p> <p>Gunfire exchanges have been heard there since early in the morning, said Manouvo Nguka, who lives in Rumangabo where the base is located.</p>

“The army seeks to regain full control of Rumangabo,” he told The Associated Press.

The situation has been critical since Wednesday night, he added.

“There was more than an hour of exchange of fire between the loyalist army and the M23 rebels,” he said.

The army earlier confirmed the rebels also attacked its positions in the Nyragongo and Rutshuru areas.

More than 20 shells were fired by the rebels on Tuesday and Wednesday on Rumangabo, Natale, near the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature, and the surrounding area, according to a statement from military spokesman Lt. Gen. Constant Ndima.

The M23 is largely an ethnic Tutsi group opposed to the Congo government that started in 2012 and seized control of Goma, a city of more than 1 million for nearly a month. U.N. forces and Congo’s army dislodged the M23 from Goma and many of rebels fled to Rwanda and Uganda before a 2013 peace agreement. Rwanda and Uganda deny claims that they support M23.

The group has recently resurfaced with increasing attacks in eastern Congo. It accuses the Congo government of not respecting the commitments it made to integrate rebel fighters into the national army.

“Knowing the position of the Congolese government on the process of demobilization and disarmament, it is clear that they act in this way because the Congolese head of state has been clear: There is no question of reintegrating the rebels into the army,” said Congo political analyst Christian Ntumba.

“The population is paying the price ... Our brothers and sisters in the east are tired of living this situation over and over,” Ntumba said, encouraging Congo’s government to boost diplomacy to get the international community to take the fighting in eastern Congo more seriously. Thousands have been displaced by this recent fighting and the east is home to myriad armed groups vying for control of the mineral-rich region.

He said that Congo must also put more pressure on neighboring Rwanda, whom he said is backing the rebels. The government has accused Rwanda of complicity with M23 rebels.

“Suspensions are crystallizing on support that would have been received by M23 from Rwanda,” said Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya.

In the capital of Equatorial Guinea, Malabo, where African foreign ministers are meeting as a prelude to two African Union summits scheduled to take place this weekend, Congo's Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula directly blamed Rwanda.

“Rwanda, I say it without hesitation, attacked the Rumangabo camp, an important military base of the Congolese armed forces,” he said.

Rwanda has described allegations of supporting rebels in Congo as baseless.

Earlier this week, Rwanda’s military accused neighboring Congolese forces of injuring several civilians in cross-border shelling and asked regional monitors to investigate.

Gen. Benoit Chavanat, Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations mission in Congo, said its forces are backing the Congolese army against M23. He told U.N.-backed Radio Okapi the joint forces are stabilizing the situation in the Tchanzu, Runyonyi and Bunagana areas.

Pope Francis is expected to visit Congo at the beginning of July, including a trip to Goma to celebrate Mass and meet with war victims, according to Congolese authorities. However, the Vatican did not immediately respond when asked Thursday whether the current fighting would bring the pope to alter his plans.

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Intuit warns of QuickBooks phishing
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/intuit-warns-of-quickbooks-phishing-threatening-to-suspend-accounts/
GIST	<p>Tax software vendor Intuit has warned that QuickBooks customers are being targeted in an ongoing series of phishing attacks impersonating the company and trying to lure them with fake account suspension warnings.</p> <p>Today's alert comes after Intuit received multiple user reports who received these phishing emails and notified their QuickBooks accounts were suspended following a failed business info review.</p> <p>"We're writing to let you know that after conducting a review of your business, we have been unable to verify some information on your account. For that reason, we have put a temporary hold on your account," the attackers say in the phishing messages while impersonating the QuickBooks support team.</p> <p>"If you believe that we've made a mistake, we'd like to remedy the situation as quickly as possible. To help us effectively revisit your account please complete the below verification form. Once verification has been completed, we will re-review your account within 24-48 hours."</p> <p>Clicking the "Complete Verification" button in the phishing email will likely redirect the recipients to a landing phishing site designed to harvest their personal information or infect their systems with malware.</p> <p>The accounting software maker also added that the sender "is not associated with Intuit, is not an authorized agent of Intuit, nor is their use of Intuit's brands authorized by Intuit."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Credential-stuffing attacks, breaches rise
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/identity-and-access/latest-credential-stuffing-breaches-underscore-ongoing-payments-pain
GIST	<p>Credential-stuffing attacks have been on the rise in recent months, as underscored by two major attacks this week. Payments and financial firm CISOs are struggling to unpack how they can reduce the risk of the particularly harmful threats.</p> <p>Online wedding planning upstart Zola confirmed earlier this week that a credential-stuffing attack had impacted a number of their customers' accounts, allowing the perpetrators to clear out all the money in some accounts and illegitimately use the credit cards and gift cards linked to other accounts. Zola said in a public statement that fewer than 0.1% of all of its accounts were actually hacked, but would not share the actual number of affected users.</p> <p>Richard Dufty, chief commercial officer at Arkose Labs, boldly described credential stuffing as "an attack that CISOs fear most and struggle to prevent [because] it is a precursor to account takeovers and because credential stuffing typically is a volumetric attack."</p> <p>"[This is] happening at scale to the point that it can overwhelm a business's entire security team," Dufty said.</p> <p>Credential-stuffing attacks were 30% higher in the first quarter of 2022 than the average over the past two years (across various sectors), according to Arkose Labs' latest attack-trend report, the Q2 2022 State of Fraud & Account Security</p>

Credential stuffing — wherein crooks use legitimate usernames and passwords that have been exposed or stolen to access accounts on different websites where the same credentials are reused — very quickly reared its ugly head again this week.

The day after breach of the Zola user accounts became public, it was reported that customers of [General Motors had](#) also been victim to credential-stuffing attacks last month. Using credentials collected from sites and applications outside of GM, bad actors had compromised the Big Three U.S. car maker's online bill payment and rewards access for more than two weeks in April, GM confirmed. Again, the "credential stuffers" in question specifically targeted the financial and payment data and accounts of legitimate customers.

"With the recent attack on wedding planning startup Zola, and now GM, credential stuffing attacks continue to fuel the web attack lifecycle, potentially using these stolen user credentials on other e-commerce sites," said Uriel Maimon, vice president of emerging products at PerimeterX. "We can expect that these credentials will soon be tested on other apps that we use daily to power our lives."

Hence, the core problem with credential stuffing is that it is not only hard to weed out — given that legitimate user credentials are being utilized by the bad actors — but these are typically not one-and-done attacks. As both Dufty and Maimon pointed out, these are going to be largely repeated offenses, ones which payments companies and financial credit, debit and gift card issues may have to cover.

Once cyber criminals have access to accounts, they can purchase goods, cash in loyalty points, sell the credentials on the dark web, or even take out lines of credit, according to Maimon. According to [PerimeterX's research](#), malicious login attempts as a percentage of total trended upwards during 2021, reaching a staggering 93.8% of all login attempts in August, he added.

Dufty said credential stuffing attacks can cause "financial drain" through the costs associated with remediating the attack itself, damage to operational efficiency and unquantifiable downstream costs. Larger companies can spend more than \$2 million per year in call center costs helping companies reset passwords. For financial and payment companies that have a responsibility to cover fraud losses legitimately incurred by their customers, there's another burden to bear with credential stuffing attacks.

But as long as online users keep recycling usernames and passwords and not using multi-factor authentication (and companies do not require it), the question of how to roll back the tide of credential stuffing will remain open.

Maimon said that the responsibility should lie with the application providers and website owners to "make it difficult and expensive for cybercriminals to use the information in order to disrupt the cycle of attacks. This means stopping the theft, validation and fraudulent use of account and identity information everywhere along a consumer's digital journey."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/27 FBI alert: exposure of education credentials
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/fbi-higher-education-credentials-sold-cybercrime-forums
GIST	<p>The FBI issued an alert on Thursday to inform the higher education sector about the exposure of credentials that can allow threat actors to access user accounts or an organization's network.</p> <p>According to the FBI, cybercriminals have been selling usernames and passwords on various public and dark web forums.</p> <p>The agency has provided three examples. One example, from January 2022, involves the sale of network and VPN access credentials belonging to US-based universities and colleges on Russian cybercrime forums. In some cases, the sellers were offering the information for thousands of dollars.</p>

	<p>In another example, observed in May 2021, cybercriminals offered more than 36,000 username and password combinations for .edu email accounts. The information was being advertised on an instant messaging platform.</p> <p>Roughly 2,000 .edu account credentials associated with a US university were offered in late 2020 on a dark web site, the FBI said.</p> <p>The agency noted that these credentials are often harvested through spear-phishing, ransomware attacks, or other types of intrusions.</p> <p>“The exposure of usernames and passwords can lead to brute force credential stuffing computer network attacks, whereby attackers attempt logins across various internet sites or exploit them for subsequent cyber attacks as criminal actors take advantage of users recycling the same credentials across multiple accounts, internet sites, and services,” the FBI said in its alert.</p> <p>“If attackers are successful in compromising a victim account, they may attempt to drain the account of stored value, leverage or re-sell credit card numbers and other personally identifiable information, submit fraudulent transactions, exploit for other criminal activity against the account holder, or use for subsequent attacks against affiliated organizations,” the agency added.</p> <p>The alert includes recommendations and mitigations, but academic institutions can also turn to the FBI for help in identifying vulnerabilities and handling incidents.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Ransomware delays India airline planes
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/spicejet-ransomware-attack-flights-grounded/
GIST	<p>Hundreds of people are stranded at airports across India after the SpiceJet airline reported on Wednesday that it was hit with a ransomware attack.</p> <p>The company told The Record that the incident impacted several flights, particularly at airports where there are restrictions on night operations.</p> <p>“While our IT team has to a large extent contained and rectified the situation, this has had a cascading effect on our flights leading to delays,” a SpiceJet spokesperson said. “SpiceJet is in touch with experts and cyber crime authorities on the issue.”</p> <p>SpiceJet publicly confirmed the ransomware attack on Twitter, but dozens of customers responded with complaints about the company’s response to the issue. Several said they were stranded at airports, and some had even boarded flights before being told the planes could not take off because of technical issues. The company later admitted that some flights were being cancelled because of the attack.</p> <p>Many of the company’s web pages also were not working as of Wednesday afternoon, Eastern time, in the U.S.</p> <p>SpiceJet is a low-cost airline and the second-largest in India based on the number of domestic passengers it carries — about 12 million a month.</p> <p>Based in Delhi and Hyderabad, the airline typically has about 630 flights per day and operates in 54 Indian cities as well as 15 other locations internationally.</p> <p>This is not the airline’s first cybersecurity issue. In 2020, TechCrunch reported that a security researcher managed to hack into SpiceJet’s systems and gained access to the information of 1.2 million passengers, including several government officials.</p>

	<p>India's national carrier Air India said in May 2021 that a data breach at one of its software providers exposed the personal information of more than 4.5 million passengers that used its services.</p> <p>In August 2021, Bangkok Airways admitted that hackers with the LockBit ransomware gang stole passenger information during a security breach following a ransomware attack.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Ransomware disrupts NJ county services
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ransomware-attack-disrupts-a-range-of-services-in-a-new-jersey-county/
GIST	<p>A county in New Jersey is still dealing with the aftermath of a ransomware attack that began on Tuesday, highlighting the disruptions that cyberattacks can wreak on local governments.</p> <p>Officials in Somerset County — which has a population of about 350,000 and is just north of Princeton University — announced on Tuesday that its email system was down.</p> <p>The county had to create temporary Gmail accounts so that residents can contact “critical departments such as the County Commissioners, Health, Emergency Operations, the County Clerk, Sheriff, and Surrogate.”</p> <p>County officials urged anyone coming to county offices to call ahead to confirm that services were available.</p> <p>The county was forced to cancel a Board of Commissioners meeting but County Administrator Colleen Mahr said the county is still able to perform most functions.</p> <p>“That said, we have activated our Emergency Operations Center and our Continuity of Operations of Government Plan,” Mahr said. “It is our assumption that this situation will remain in effect at least for the rest of the week.”</p> <p>Emergency 9-1-1-communications were unaffected by the attack and are currently fully functional, Mahr added.</p> <p>The county later released an update saying the County Clerk’s office was unable to provide most services that require internet access. This includes gaining access to land records, vital statistics, probate records and title searchers before 1977.</p> <p>Officials urged those requesting mail-in ballot replacements to call the county office. New Jersey is in the process of holding primary elections and the deadline to apply for mail-in ballots is May 31. County officials reiterated that election systems were unaffected by the ransomware attack.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the county said it is continuing to keep network-linked computers turned off, meaning any emails to officials would not be received or responded to.</p> <p>“We are working hard to ensure vital services the public depends on continue to be delivered, such as recycling, road maintenance, and transportation for seniors,” Mahr said, adding that their IT department is “working around the clock to evaluate our situation, prevent further damage, and ultimately recover.”</p> <p>The attack makes Somerset County the 17th in the U.S. officially hit with ransomware in 2021, according to cybersecurity firm Emsisoft, which tracks the number of attacks each year.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/27 Magniber ransomware upgraded for Win11
SOURCE	https://blog.360totalsecurity.com/en/win11-users-beware-magniber-ransomware-has-been-upgraded-again-aiming-at-win11/?web_view=true

GIST	<p>At the end of April this year, the Magniber ransomware disguised as a Windows 10 upgrade patch package and spread widely, and 360 Security Center warned it. Just recently, 360 Security Center detected a new attack on the Windows 11 system in the family. Since May 25, its attack volume has increased significantly, and its main dissemination package names have also been updated, such as: win10-11_system_upgrade_software.msi, covid.warning.readme.xxxxxxxx.msi, etc.</p> <p>The transmission method is still various forums, cracked software websites, fake pornographic websites, etc. When users visit these websites, they are induced to download from third-party network disks.</p> <p>The virus program itself has not changed much, and can infect multiple versions of Windows operating systems. The following figure shows the scene of Windows 11 being infected by the virus.</p> <p>After being encrypted by the ransomware, the file suffix is a random suffix, and each victim will have an independent payment page. If the ransom cannot be paid within the specified time, the link will be invalid. If the victim can pay the ransom within 5 days, he only needs to pay 0.09 Bitcoin, and the ransom will be doubled after 5 days.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Extortion market gets into ransomware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/industrial-spy-data-extortion-market-gets-into-the-ransomware-game/
GIST	<p>The Industrial Spy data extortion marketplace has now launched its own ransomware operation, where they now also encrypt victim's devices.</p> <p>Last month, we reported on a new data extortion marketplace called Industrial Spy that allowed threat actors, and possibly even business competitors, to purchase data stolen from companies.</p> <p>This marketplace sells different types of stolen data, ranging from selling 'premium' data for millions of dollars to individual files for as little as \$2.</p> <p>To promote their service, the threat actors partnered with adware loaders and fake crack sites to distribute malware that would create README.txt files on a device.</p> <p>The threat actors used these files to promote their marketplace, explaining that readers can purchase schemes, drawings, technologies, political and military secrets, accounting reports, and client databases of their competitors.</p> <p>Industrial Spy gets into the ransomware game</p> <p>Last week, security researcher MalwareHunterTeam found a new sample of the Industrial Spy malware with what looked more like a ransom note rather than a promotional text file.</p> <p>This ransom note now states that the Industrial Spy threat actors not only stole the victim's data but also encrypted it.</p> <p>"Unfortunately we have to report you that your company was compromised. All your files were encrypted and you can't restore them without our private key. Trying to restore it without our help may cause complete loss of your data," reads the Industrial Spy ransom note shared below.</p> <p>"Also we researched whole your corporate network and downloaded all your sensitive data to our servers. If we will not get any contact from you in 3 next days we will publish your data on the site 'Industrial Spy Market'."</p> <p>MalwareHunterTeam shared the malware sample with BleepingComputer to confirm if it encrypted files as it said.</p>

BleepingComputer's tests showed that the Industrial Spy ransomware does indeed encrypt files, but unlike most other ransomware families, does not append a new extension to encrypted file's names, as shown below.

BleepingComputer also shared the sample with ransomware expert Michael Gillespie, who said from a glance that he believes that it uses DES encryption, with the key encrypted using an RSA1024 public key.

The ransomware also uses a filemarker of 0xFEEDBEEF, which we have not seen before in a ransomware family. However, this filemarker should not be confused with 0xDEADBEEF; a well-known [magic debug value](#) used in programming.

While encrypting files, the Industrial Spy ransomware will create the above ransom note named '**README.html**' in every folder on the device.

These ransom notes contain a TOX id that victims can use to contact the ransomware gang and negotiate a ransom.

A tie to Cuba ransomware?

When researching the TOX ID and email address found in the ransom note, MalwareHunterTeam discovered a strange connection to the [Cuba ransomware](#) operation.

A ransomware sample uploaded to [VirusTotal](#) creates a ransom note with an identical TOX ID and email address. However, instead of linking to the Industrial Spy Tor site, it links to Cuba Ransomware's data leak site and uses the same file name, **!! READ ME !!.txt**, as known Cuba ransom notes.

Furthermore, the encrypted files have the **.cuba** extension appended to them, just like the regular Cuba ransomware operation does when encrypting files.

While this does not 100% tie the two groups together, it's very possible that the Industrial Spy threat actors simply used Cuba's information while testing the creation of their ransomware.

However, it is peculiar and something that security researchers and analysts will need to keep an eye on.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/27 Online child sex abuse at record levels
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/online-child-sex-abuse-at-record-levels/
GIST	<p>The massive increase in online child sexual abuse and exploitation sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic continues unabated, INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock told the World Economic Forum in Davos.</p> <p>In a panel on cyber security, Secretary General Stock said reporting by private industry and public hotlines, in addition to law enforcement exchanges, has shown a consistently rising number of online child abuse images, with 2021 the worst year on record.</p> <p>The growth of Internet connectivity is set to see even greater numbers of children being abused and exploited online.</p> <p>“The sheer volume of images is already overwhelming law enforcement worldwide unless the public and private sectors do more to unify our efforts, we will only see this disturbing upward trend in cases grow.” said Stock. “If we are to more effectively tackle online child sexual abuse and exploitation, we cannot waste time duplicating efforts or not sharing information. Children’s lives are at risk.”</p> <p>Self-generated content, where a child victim is groomed and coerced into creating images and video of their abuse has grown significantly. Offenders record their interactions with images of the victim shared</p>

through online platforms or networks. Live-streaming of child sexual exploitation for payment has also seen an increase in recent years.

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse require long-term recovery to deal with their trauma. The repeated sharing of images and videos portraying the abuse re-victimizes survivors and hinders their recovery.

INTERPOL's [International Child Sexual Exploitation \(ICSE\) database](#) provides a global platform to help identify victims and their abusers. The database avoids duplication of effort and saves precious time by letting investigators know whether a series of images has already been discovered or identified in another country, or whether it has similar features to other images.

Every day, the ICSE database helps investigators around the world identify an average of seven child abuse victims, and since its creation has helped identify and document more than 12,500 offenders.

[Return to Top](#)

[Read more at INTERPOL](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Young gunmen turn to new social networks
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/05/26/shooters-social-media/
GIST	<p>Before two 18-year-old men allegedly killed 31 people in separate shootings over the past two weeks, they turned to a variety of social media apps to share troubling private messages.</p> <p>Both men — one killed by authorities in Uvalde, Tex., and the other charged in the Buffalo shooting — used a combination of disappearing-video app Snapchat, Instagram direct messages, chat app Discord and social app Yubo to meet people and share their violent plans with acquaintances. In Buffalo, the suspect also used the video streaming platform Twitch to publicize his deadly attack.</p> <p>These apps — many of which have been adopted by Gen Z as teens and other young people seek out more-private corners of the Internet — are ill-equipped to police such content. They are fundamentally designed to keep communications private, presenting different challenges than Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, where violent screeds and videos have been algorithmically amplified to millions of viewers.</p> <p>The way that generation uses social media more generally could render years of work to spot and identify public signs of upcoming violence obsolete, social media experts warn.</p> <p>“There is this shift toward more-private spaces, more-ephemeral content,” said Evelyn Douek, a senior research fellow at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University. “The content moderation tools that platforms have been building and that we’ve been arguing about are kind of dated or talking about the last war.”</p> <p>Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) said Wednesday that the Texas gunman, who authorities have identified as Salvador Rolando Ramos, wrote on social media that “I’m going to shoot my grandmother” and “I’m going to shoot an elementary school” shortly before the attack. Facebook confirmed that the messages were sent privately but declined to say which of its social networks were used.</p> <p>Stephen Garcia, who considered himself Ramos’s best friend in eighth grade, previously told The Washington Post that Ramos used the Yubo app, a platform where users can swipe on one another’s profiles, Tinder-style, or hang out in live-streaming rooms and virtually “meet” other users by playing games and chatting.</p> <p>Yubo spokeswoman Amy Williams said in an email that the company is not able to release information outside of direct requests from law enforcement, but that the company is investigating an account that has been banned from its platform.</p> <p>“We are deeply saddened by this unspeakable loss and are fully cooperating with law enforcement on their investigation,” she said.</p>

In the Buffalo grocery store shooting, the alleged gunman, Payton Gendron, sent an invitation to an online chatroom on the instant messaging platform Discord that was accepted by 15 users, who were then allowed to scroll back through months of Gendron's voluminous writings and racist screeds, The Post has reported. Users who clicked through to the room also could view an online video stream, where footage of the Buffalo attack was broadcast. That attack was also broadcast on Twitch, a live-streaming service popular among video game users.

Discord and Twitch did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Twitch was able to remove the stream within two minutes of the shooting's start, Angela Hession, the company's head of trust and safety, said previously. The site has an all-hours escalation system in place to address urgent reports, such as live-streamed violence.

Discord has since said the messages were visible only to the suspect until he shared them with others the day of the attack.

In the wake of high-profile mass shootings in recent years, communities, school districts and tech companies made major investments in safety systems aimed at rooting out violent screeds in the hopes of preventing attacks. The Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District used an artificial intelligence-backed program to scan social media posts for potential threats years before the attack, although it's unclear whether it was in use at the time of the shooting.

But these tools are ill-equipped to address the surging popularity of live video streaming and private or disappearing messaging that are increasingly used by young adults and teens. Those messages are then closed off to outsiders, who might be able to spot the warning signs that a troubled individual might be about to inflict harm on themselves and others.

These newer social networks also have far less history dealing with violent content, and they're less likely to have policies and personnel in place to respond to the incitement of violence on their services, experts said.

"For smaller sites or newer sites, they're having the moments that bigger services like Facebook and YouTube were having in 2015 and 2016," said Emma Llansó, the director of the Free Expression Project at the Center for Democracy and Technology, a nonprofit backed by major tech companies.

The adoption of these upstart apps in mass shootings reflects a larger generational shift within social media use. Gen Z, teens and young adults born after 1996 have been flocking to apps that emphasize private messaging and live-streaming or allow their users to post content that disappears from public profiles after a certain amount of time.

They have largely shunned legacy social media apps such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube that rose to popularity by providing public and open spaces to communicate with the world.

The new apps' role in the shootings has caught the attention of the New York and New Jersey state attorneys general, who in the wake of the Buffalo shooting launched probes into Discord and Twitch.

"Time and time again, we have seen the real-world devastation that is borne of these dangerous and hateful platforms," New York Attorney General Letitia James (D) said in a statement announcing the probe after the Buffalo shooting. "We are doing everything in our power to shine a spotlight on this alarming behavior and take action to ensure it never happens again."

Social media has played a prominent role in many mass shootings, and there have been high-profile instances in which gunmen have posted about their plans online in plain sight and have not been caught.

Republican lawmakers, who have long resisted measures to expand background checks or limit access to guns, aimed to put a spotlight on the role of social media in the Texas shooting on Thursday. "The

common theme of almost all of these mass shootings is the social alienation of sick young men, often fueled by social media,” tweeted Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska). He did not mention gun access in the post.

Tech industry officials pushed back, warning that such tweets could distract from broader policy questions about gun control.

“Some people will try to make it about Facebook so that it’s not about guns,” tweeted Brian Fishman, former director of counterterrorism, dangerous organizations and content policy at Facebook. “Don’t let them.”

Tech giants have also been caught up in a years-long power struggle as they seek to balance privacy with policing content on their sites and demands from law enforcement agencies.

Facebook and other companies have moved toward strong encryption, technology that scrambles the contents of a message so that only the sender and receiver can see it. WhatsApp and Apple iMessage use it, as do messaging apps like Signal. And Facebook has said it wants to introduce encrypted messaging as a default setting to Instagram and Facebook Messenger, prompting backlash from politicians and officials in law enforcement who have warned that the broad adoption of this technology can leave them in the dark and make it more difficult for them to investigate violence.

Some major tech companies do scan messages for harmful content, such as child sexual abuse or spam. But experts warn that monitoring more private communication spaces is a delicate balance.

“There are so many incredibly legitimate reasons people want to use private communications,” Llansó said. “That is not something that should be sacrificed for all people because some people want to use private communications for atrocious reasons.”

Social media users tend to skew younger, but the generational gaps among the user base among private messaging apps like Snapchat are larger than they are for more traditional public-facing sites like Facebook.

When Snapchat users send private messages to each other they disappear after the recipient has read them. The app also pioneered the concept of “stories” — public posts that last for just one day — which was later copied by Facebook.

Snap said Wednesday that it has suspended an account that may have been connected to Ramos and that it is also working with law enforcement.

Meanwhile, Facebook has struggled to keep pace with the rapidly evolving social habits of teen users.

Facebook’s own internal research reports that young adults are “less engaged” than older adults, posing a significant risk to the company’s business, according to a trove of internal company documents known as the Facebook Files. The company’s research found that young adults prefer sharing updates about their lives over text messages, rather than broadcasting to a wide range of Facebook friends. The researchers suggested that the company respond by leaning into groups and more private forms of sharing.

“It’s always going to be a cat-and-mouse game,” Douek said. “These are just sort of intractable problems. But that doesn’t mean that we can’t improve or we should let platforms off the hook.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Face search engine alarmingly accurate
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/05/26/a-face-search-engine-anyone-can-use-is-alarmingly-accurate/
GIST	For \$29.99 a month, a website called PimEyes offers a potentially dangerous superpower from the world of science fiction: the ability to search for a face, finding obscure photos that would otherwise have been as safe as the proverbial needle in the vast digital haystack of the internet.

A search takes mere seconds. You upload a photo of a face, check a box agreeing to the terms of service and then get a grid of photos of faces deemed similar, with links to where they appear on the internet. The New York Times used PimEyes on the faces of a dozen Times journalists, with their consent, to test its powers.

PimEyes found photos of every person, some that the journalists had never seen before, even when they were wearing sunglasses or a mask, or their face was turned away from the camera, in the image used to conduct the search.

PimEyes found one reporter dancing at an art museum event a decade ago, and crying after being proposed to, a photo that she didn't particularly like but that the photographer had decided to use to advertise his business on Yelp. A tech reporter's younger self was spotted in an awkward crush of fans at the Coachella music festival in 2011. A foreign correspondent appeared in countless wedding photos, evidently the life of every party, and in the blurry background of a photo taken of someone else at a Greek airport in 2019. A journalist's past life in a rock band was unearthed, as was another's preferred summer camp getaway.

Unlike [Clearview AI](#), a similar facial recognition tool available only to law enforcement, PimEyes does not include results from social media sites. The sometimes surprising images that PimEyes surfaced came instead from news articles, wedding photography pages, review sites, blogs and pornography sites. Most of the matches for the dozen journalists' faces were correct. For the women, the incorrect photos often came from pornography sites, which was unsettling in the suggestion that it *could* be them. (To be clear, it was not them.)

A tech executive who asked not to be identified said he used PimEyes fairly regularly, primarily to identify people who harass him on Twitter and use their real photos on their accounts but not their real names. Another PimEyes user who asked to stay anonymous said he used the tool to find the real identities of actresses from pornographic films, and to search for explicit photos of his Facebook friends.

The new owner of PimEyes is Giorgi Gobronidze, a 34-year-old academic who says his interest in advanced technology was sparked by Russian cyberattacks on his home country, Georgia.

Mr. Gobronidze said he believed that PimEyes could be a tool for good, helping people keep tabs on their online reputation. The journalist who disliked the photo that a photographer was using, for example, could now ask him to take it off his Yelp page.

PimEyes users are supposed to search only for their own faces or for the faces of people who have consented, Mr. Gobronidze said. But he said he was relying on people to act "ethically," offering little protection against the technology's erosion of the long-held ability to stay anonymous in a crowd. PimEyes has no controls in place to prevent users from searching for a face that is not their own, and suggests a user pay a hefty fee to keep damaging photos from an ill-considered night from following him or her forever.

"It's stalkerware by design no matter what they say," said Ella Jakubowska, a policy adviser at European Digital Rights, a privacy advocacy group.

Under new management

Mr. Gobronidze grew up in the shadow of military conflict. His kindergarten was bombed during the civil war that ensued after Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The country was effectively cut off from the world in 2008 when Russia invaded and the internet went down. The experiences inspired him to study the role of technological dominance in national security.

After stints working as a lawyer and serving in the Georgian Army, Mr. Gobronidze got a master's degree in international relations. He began his career as a professor in 2014, eventually landing at European University in Tbilisi, Georgia, where he still teaches.

In 2017, Mr. Gobronidze was in an exchange program, lecturing at a university in Poland, when one of his students introduced him, he said, to two “hacker” types — Lucasz Kowalczyk and Denis Tatina — who were working on a facial search engine. They were “brilliant masterminds,” he said, but “absolute introverts” who were not interested in public attention.

They agreed to speak with him about their creation, which eventually became [PimEyes](#), for his academic research, Mr. Gobronidze said. He said they had explained how their search engine used neural net technology to map the features of a face, in order to match it to faces with similar measurements, and that the program was able to learn over time how to best determine a match.

“I felt like a person from the Stone Age when I first met them,” Mr. Gobronidze said. “Like I was listening to science fiction.”

He kept in touch with the founders, he said, and watched as PimEyes began getting more and more attention in the media, [mostly](#) of the [scathing variety](#). In 2020, PimEyes claimed to have a new owner, who wished to stay anonymous, and the corporate headquarters were moved from Poland to Seychelles, a popular African offshore tax haven.

Mr. Gobronidze said he “heard” sometime last year that this new owner of the site wanted to sell it. So he quickly set about gathering funds to make an offer, selling a seaside villa he had inherited from his grandparents and borrowing a large sum from his younger brother, Shalva Gobronidze, a software engineer at a bank. The professor would not reveal how much he had paid.

“It wasn’t as big an amount as someone might expect,” Mr. Gobronidze said.

In December, Mr. Gobronidze created a corporation, EMEARobotics, to acquire PimEyes and registered it in Dubai because of the United Arab Emirates’ low tax rate. He said he had retained most of the site’s small tech and support team, and hired a consulting firm in Belize to handle inquiries and regulatory questions.

Mr. Gobronidze has rented office space for PimEyes in a tower in downtown Tbilisi. It is still being renovated, light fixtures hanging loose from the ceiling.

Tatia Dolidze, a colleague of Mr. Gobronidze’s at European University, described him as “curious” and “stubborn,” and said she had been surprised when he told her that he was buying a face search engine.

“It was difficult to imagine Giorgi as a businessman,” Ms. Dolidze said by email.

Now he is a businessman who owns a company steeped in controversy, primarily around whether we have any special right of control over images of us that we never expected to be found this way. Mr. Gobronidze said facial recognition technology would be used to control people if governments and big companies had the only access to it.

And he is imagining a world where facial recognition is accessible to anyone.

‘Essentially extortion’

A few months back, Cher Scarlett, a computer engineer, tried out PimEyes for the first time and was confronted with a chapter of her life that she had tried hard to forget.

In 2005, when Ms. Scarlett was 19 and broke, she considered working in pornography. She traveled to New York City for an audition that was so humiliating and abusive that she abandoned the idea.

PimEyes unearthed the decades-old trauma, with links to where exactly the explicit photos could be found on the web. They were sprinkled in among more recent portraits of Ms. Scarlett, who works on labor rights and has been the subject of media coverage for a [high-profile](#) worker [revolt](#) she led at [Apple](#).

“I had no idea up until that point that those images were on the internet,” she said.

Worried about how people would react to the images, Ms. Scarlett immediately began looking into how to get them removed, an experience she described in a [Medium post](#) and to [CNN](#). When she clicked on one of the explicit photos on PimEyes, a menu popped up offering a link to the image, a link to the website where it appeared and an option to “exclude from public results” on PimEyes.

But exclusion, Ms. Scarlett quickly discovered, was available only to subscribers who paid for “PROtect plans,” which cost from \$89.99 to \$299.99 per month. “It’s essentially extortion,” said Ms. Scarlett, who eventually signed up for the most expensive plan.

Mr. Gobronidze disagreed with that characterization. He pointed to [a free tool](#) for deleting results from the PimEyes index that is not prominently advertised on the site. He also provided a receipt showing that PimEyes had refunded Ms. Scarlett for the \$299.99 plan last month.

PimEyes has tens of thousands of subscribers, Mr. Gobronidze said, with most visitors to the site coming from the United States and Europe. It makes the bulk of its money from subscribers to its PROtect service, which includes help from PimEyes support staff in getting photos taken down from external sites.

PimEyes has a free “[opt-out](#)” as well, for people to have data about themselves removed from the site, including the search images of their faces. To opt out, Ms. Scarlett provided a photo of her teenage self and a scan of her government-issued identification. At the beginning of April, she received a confirmation that her opt-out request had been accepted.

“Your potential results containing your face are removed from our system,” the email from PimEyes said.

But when The Times ran a PimEyes search of Ms. Scarlett’s face with her permission a month later, there were more than 100 results, including the explicit ones.

Mr. Gobronidze said that this was a “sad story” and that opting out didn’t block a person’s face from being searched. Instead, it blocks from PimEyes’s search results any photos of faces “with a high similarity level” at the time of the opt-out, meaning people need to regularly opt out, with multiple photos of themselves, if they hope to stay out of a PimEyes search.

Mr. Gobronidze said explicit photos were particularly tricky, comparing their tendency to proliferate online to the mythical beast Hydra.

“Cut one head and two others appear,” he said.

Mr. Gobronidze said he wanted “ethical usage” of PimEyes, meaning that people search only for their own faces and not those of strangers.

But PimEyes does little to enforce this goal, beyond a box that a searcher must click asserting that the face being uploaded is his or her own. Helen Nissenbaum, a Cornell University professor who studies privacy, called this “absurd,” unless the site had a searcher provide government identification, as Ms. Scarlett had to when she opted out.

“If it’s a useful thing to do, to see where our own faces are, we have to imagine that a company offering only that service is going to be transparent and audited,” Ms. Nissenbaum said.

PimEyes does no such audits, though Mr. Gobronidze said the site would bar a user with search activity “beyond anything logical,” describing one with more than 1,000 searches in a day as an example. He is relying on users to do what’s right and mentioned that anyone who searched someone else’s face without permission would be breaking European privacy law.

“It should be the responsibility of the person using it,” he said. “We’re just a tool provider.”

Ms. Scarlett said she had never thought she would talk publicly about what happened to her when she was 19, but felt she had to after she realized that the images were out there.

“It would have been used against me,” she said. “I’m glad I’m the person who found them, but to me, that’s more about luck than PimEyes working as intended. It shouldn’t exist at all.”

Exceptions to the rule

Despite saying PimEyes should be used only for self-searches, Mr. Gobronidze is open to other uses as long as they are “ethical.” He said he approved of investigative journalists and the role PimEyes played in [identifying Americans](#) who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The Times allows its journalists to use face recognition search engines for reporting but has internal rules about the practice. “Each request to use a facial recognition tool for reporting purposes requires prior review and approval by a senior member of the masthead and our legal department to ensure the usage adheres to our standards and applicable law,” said a Times spokeswoman, Danielle Rhoades Ha.

There are users Mr. Gobronidze doesn’t want. He [recently](#) blocked people in Russia from the site, in solidarity with Ukraine. He mentioned that PimEyes was willing, [like Clearview AI](#), to offer its service for free to Ukrainian organizations or the Red Cross, if it could help in the search for missing persons.

The better-known Clearview AI has faced serious headwinds in Europe and around the world. Privacy regulators in Canada, Australia and parts of Europe have declared Clearview’s database of 20 billion face images illegal and ordered Clearview to delete their citizens’ photos. [Italy](#) and [Britain](#) issued multimillion-dollar fines.

A German data protection agency announced an investigation into PimEyes [last year](#) for possible violations of Europe’s privacy law, the [General Data Protection Regulation](#), which includes strict rules around the use of biometric data. That investigation is continuing.

Mr. Gobronidze said he had not heard from any German authorities. “I am eager to answer all of the questions they might have,” he said.

He is not concerned about privacy regulators, he said, because PimEyes operates differently. He described it as almost being like a digital card catalog, saying the company does not store photos or individual face templates but rather URLs for individual images associated with the facial features they contain. It’s all public, he said, and PimEyes instructs users to search only for their own faces. Whether that architectural difference matters to regulators is yet to be determined.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Social media, Texas shooter’s messages
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/explainer-social-media-texas-shooters-messages-85009197
GIST	<p>Could Facebook have known about ominous direct-message threats made by a gunman who Texas authorities say massacred 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school? Could it have warned the authorities?</p> <p>Texas Gov. Greg Abbott revealed the online messages sent minutes before the Wednesday attack, although he called them posts, which are typically distributed to a wide audience. Facebook stepped in to note that the gunman sent one-to-one direct messages, not public posts, and that they weren’t discovered until “after the terrible tragedy.”</p> <p>The latest mass shootings in the U.S. by active social-media users may bring more pressure on social media companies to heighten their scrutiny of online communications, even though conservative politicians — Abbott among them — are also pushing social platforms to relax their restrictions on some speech.</p>

SHOULD FACEBOOK HAVE CAUGHT THE SHOOTER'S MESSAGES?

Facebook parent company Meta has said it monitors people's private messages for some kinds of harmful content, such as links to malware or images of child sexual exploitation. But copied images can be detected using unique identifiers — a kind of digital signature — which makes them relatively easy for computer systems to flag. Trying to interpret a string of threatening words — which can resemble a joke, satire or song lyrics — is a far more difficult task for artificial intelligence systems.

Facebook could, for instance, flag certain phrases such as “going to kill” or “going to shoot,” but without context — something AI in general has a lot of trouble with — there would be too many false positives for the company to analyze. So Facebook and other platforms rely on user reports to catch threats, harassment and other violations of the law or their own policies. As evidenced by the latest shootings, that often comes too late, if at all.

PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE

Even this kind of monitoring could soon be obsolete, since Meta plans to roll out end-to-end-encryption on its Facebook and Instagram messaging systems next year. Such encryption means that no one other than the sender and the recipient — not even Meta — can decipher people's messages. WhatsApp, also owned by Meta, already has such encryption.

A recent Meta-commissioned report emphasized the benefits of such privacy but also noted some risks -- including users who could abuse the encryption to sexually exploit children, facilitate human trafficking and spread hate speech.

Apple has long had end-to-end encryption on its messaging system. That has brought the iPhone maker into conflict with the Justice Department over messaging privacy. After the deadly shooting of three U.S. sailors at a Navy installation in December 2019, the Justice Department insisted that investigators needed access to data from two locked and encrypted iPhones that belonged to the alleged gunman, a Saudi aviation student.

Security experts say this could be done if Apple were to engineer a “backdoor” to allow access to messages sent by alleged criminals. Such a secret key would let them decipher encrypted information with a court order.

But the same experts warned that such backdoors into encryption systems make them inherently insecure. Just knowing that a backdoor exists is enough to focus the world's spies and criminals on discovering the mathematical keys that could unlock it. And when they do, everyone's information is essentially vulnerable to anyone with the secret key.

[Return to Top](#)

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Rise, fall environmentalist underground ELF
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/magazine/earth-liberation-front-joseph-mahmoud-dibee.html
GIST	Late one summer evening in 2018, an American citizen named Joseph Mahmoud Dibee was sitting in José Martí International Airport in Havana, Cuba — trying, unsuccessfully, to sleep — when he was approached by three men. Dibee, a civil engineer, was in Havana on a layover. After a long business trip in Ecuador, he was heading home to Russia, where he lived with his wife and stepson. The men demanded his passport, then led him out of the terminal and into a waiting sedan. Dibee asked where they were going, but got no response. Sandwiched between his captors, he was driven miles through the night before finally arriving at what appeared to be a jail.

For the next three days, Dibee would claim in a subsequent court filing, he was imprisoned without explanation and, in effect, tortured. His small concrete cell was open to the elements; during the day, the cage baked. As Dibee, who was then 50, sweat through his clothes, the jail's guards gave him little to drink. He soon became nauseated and began to repeatedly pass out. With no way of contacting his family, Dibee worried that, if he died, they would never learn what happened to him.

On his fourth day of confinement, weak from dehydration, Dibee was dragged to an air-conditioned trailer in another part of the facility. He was met by a middle-aged man in fatigues who identified himself as an officer in Cuba's state intelligence service. Smiling, the officer held up a bottle of water.

"But first," he said, "tell us about the fires."

Several days later, on Aug. 9, 2018, Cuban authorities handed Dibee, in shackles, over to agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. To the F.B.I., Dibee's arrest marked the end of a decade-long manhunt for one of the agency's most wanted domestic terrorists. In 2006, Dibee was indicted on a charge of participation in a series of arsons carried out by a shadowy band of environmental activists known as the Earth Liberation Front. In the late 1990s, the ELF became notorious for setting fire to symbols of ecological destruction, including timber mills, an S.U.V. dealership and a ski resort. The group, which warned of imminent ecological catastrophe, was widely demonized. Its exploits were condemned by mainstream environmental groups, ridiculed by the media and inspired a furious crackdown from law enforcement.

Fleeing before he could be arrested, Dibee had spent years as a fugitive in Syria, Russia and Mexico, until he was picked up passing through Havana. After his interrogation by the Cuban authorities, the F.B.I. flew him in a Gulfstream jet to Portland, Ore., where he was arraigned for charges relating to his role in the attacks. [This April, Dibee pleaded guilty to arson](#) and conspiracy to commit arson.

The plea comes at a moment when the story of the Earth Liberation Front seems more relevant than ever. After decades in which America's environmental movement confined its activities largely to rallies, marches and other lawful forms of protest, frustrated activists have begun taking a more confrontational approach. Younger groups like the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion have blockaded roads and occupied the offices of lawmakers. During the Standing Rock protests of 2016, thousands of demonstrators sought to physically impede construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Tim DeChristopher, a founder of the Climate Disobedience Center, which supports protesters who engage in nonviolent resistance, told me that, in the 2000s, such direct action was championed mostly by a fringe group of anarchists. (DeChristopher himself was sent to prison after placing winning bids at public auctions for oil and gas leases and then refusing to pay.) Now, even staid Washington-based environmental groups, sensing an increasingly unruly mood among their base, have slowly started to embrace more radical tactics. In 2017, the Sierra Club formally lifted its 120-year ban on civil disobedience after its executive director and other senior members were arrested for strapping themselves to a gate outside the White House.

Recently, some climate activists have begun to openly contemplate the possibility — in their eyes, the necessity — of directly sabotaging the infrastructure of the carbon economy. Foremost among them is the academic Andreas Malm, whose recent book, ["How to Blow Up a Pipeline,"](#) calls for smashing the tools of fossil-fuel extraction as a last-ditch means of averting ecological collapse. In interviews with mainstream outlets such as [Vox](#) and [The New Yorker](#), Malm contends that climate activists should give up their dogmatic attachment to pacifism and start to destroy the machines that actually produce carbon. While acknowledging that such attacks might fail, Malm nevertheless argues that the urgency of global warming — in the 16 years since Dibee's indictment, the world has collectively pumped about 500 billion more tons of carbon into the atmosphere — demands new tactics. "I think that the situation is so dire, so extreme," he told Vox, "that we have to experiment."

This summer in Oregon, Dibee will be sentenced by Judge Ann Aiken. The prosecution is recommending a sentence of more than seven years, as well as a yet-to-be-determined amount of financial restitution.

When Dibee and his lawyers plead for leniency, Aiken may hear some of the largely forgotten history of the ELF — how a small group of activists, fueled by idealism and rage, brought the entire weight of the federal government down upon themselves, severely curtailing what remained of the radical environmental movement in this country. As climate change, no longer an abstraction, has begun to transform American life in the form of heat, fire, floods and smoke, it is a story that may sound different to some listeners now than when prosecutors first told it.

The series of events that would ultimately lead to Dibee's capture by federal authorities began 30-odd years ago, when a bookish teenager named Kevin Tubbs was leafing through the Utne Reader and came across an ad for the National Anti-Vivisection Society. Curious, he wrote away requesting a pamphlet. When it arrived a few weeks later, Tubbs was horrified. Animals, he learned, were being routinely tortured in the name of science. The photos he was able to find — dogs with their faces sliced open, rats butchered alive, monkeys screaming at the electrodes implanted in their abdomens — seemed like windows into hell. Tubbs's family lived on the outskirts of Omaha, a few miles from the stockyards. On some nights, when the wind drifted south, he could smell the cattle, their dung giving off a lush, loamy scent. He read that mother cows sobbed when separated from their calves, and it occurred to him that he was living next to the infrastructure of atrocity.

Tubbs went vegetarian, then vegan, and was soon a full-time activist, getting regularly arrested at protests. But Tubbs wasn't naïve about what such demonstrations could realistically accomplish. Seeking a new approach, he applied for an editor position at the Earth First! Journal, an environmental newsletter in Eugene, Ore. His application included a copy of his rap sheet; he was hired immediately. The organization that ran the journal was founded a decade and a half earlier, in 1980, by a group of activists who became disaffected with the professionalized, incrementalist approach of the environmental establishment, embodied by groups like the Sierra Club. They were, in other words, radical environmentalists. The radicals believed the modest reforms pursued through traditional legislative channels simply weren't sufficient to save the planet from ecological annihilation.

By the mid-90s, the city of Eugene had become an incubator of political dissent and a gathering place for radical and militant environmentalists. In the working-class Whiteaker neighborhood, anarchists had regular battles with cops. To the east, the land turned primeval, with millions of acres of ancient forest spread across the vast Cascade mountain range. While some Eugene residents earned their incomes off timber, others were drawn by the song of the trees.

In Eugene, Tubbs met a man named Jacob Ferguson. Ferguson wore all black and was covered in piercings and tattoos, including an ornate pentagram on his head. A vagabond, freshly sober from heroin, Ferguson had recently settled in Eugene with his pregnant girlfriend. Tubbs detected something gentle beneath Ferguson's piratical exterior, and the two men soon became inseparable.

In 1991, an unknown arsonist set fire to a portion of the vast Willamette National Forest, not far outside town. The blaze burned for two weeks, destroying about 9,000 acres, much of it old-growth firs, in the Warner Creek watershed. There were no suspects, but among activists, suspicion fell on the local timber industry. While most old-growth forest was protected from logging, a loophole in federal law meant partly burned sections were fair game. After the fire, the U.S. Forest Service — the agency that coordinates the sale of national forests to industry — prepared to sell the scorched acreage to logging companies, who would "salvage" the remaining trees. Activists persuaded a court to grant an injunction against the sale. But then, in 1995, President Bill Clinton signed a bill suspending protection for Willamette and hundreds of other forests, opening them to logging.

Dozens of incensed activists, including Tubbs and Ferguson, took to the mountains in hopes of physically defending the wilderness. Whenever logging trucks tried to approach the old-growth trees, the protesters jumped into the road and handcuffed themselves to barrels filled with concrete. As the campaign stretched on, the activists built a small settlement near Warner Creek, digging trenches and erecting a fort with a working drawbridge. Tubbs occasionally occupied a towering 20-foot structure ingeniously constructed by a fellow protester who had also found his way to the Cascades — Joseph Dibee.

Like Tubbs's, Dibee's environmentalism was rooted in an adolescent wounding. Dibee had been a shy child who suffered from asthma. His parents moved to the United States from Syria before he was born, and until he was 8 he spoke only Arabic. His father, an avid outdoorsman, would lead him into the mountains, where they'd forage for mushrooms. On one of these trips, Dibee's father took him to a small, sunlit meadow, with a creek, secreted away in an obscure corner of the forest. He began hiking up to the spot by himself, for the tranquillity — a sensitive boy's inviolable retreat. And then, one day, when Dibee arrived at his sanctuary, he saw it was gone. A vast plot of trees had been felled for timber, leaving the scalp of the ancient forest with a bald patch, as if shaved by a colossal razor.

Surviving on donated food and braving a glacial winter that buried their tents in snow, the occupiers lasted almost a year. It ended when the Clinton administration issued new restrictions on logging in national forests, saving Warner Creek. While most local activists took the occupation as an unmitigated success, to Tubbs the victory felt empty. At that point, he was 26 and had been trying to make substantive change for nearly a decade — letter-writing, leafleting, canvassing, tabling, teach-ins, lawsuits, blockades, boycotts, vigils, pickets, rallies, even guerrilla street theater. And yet nothing seemed to be getting better.

A few months after Warner Creek wrapped up, the Earth First! Journal received and published a mysterious message. It was from an entity calling itself the Earth Liberation Front. The ELF was said to be a clandestine, leaderless group, dedicated to aggressive vandalism in the name of the environment. The first cell of "Elves" had recently popped up in Britain, followed by others on the European continent. The missive to the journal was a call to arms, inviting its American readers to "allow those who are destroying this planet to be witness to some of the most destructive eco-sabotage and criminal damage ever seen, persuading them to either give up their practices or suffer the consequences!!!"

In the predawn hours of Oct. 28, 1996, a newspaper carrier for The Salem Statesman Journal was making his rounds when he passed a federal ranger station in the forest near the town of Detroit, Ore., and noticed that a truck in the parking lot was on fire. The blaze was easily contained, but a worker later discovered, on the station's roof, a milk jug filled with fuel that had failed to ignite. On one of the station's walls, someone had spray-painted the phrase "Earth Liberation Front."

Two nights later, a group consisting of Tubbs, Ferguson and, federal prosecutors claim, a midwife named Josephine Overaker drove to a second ranger station near a town called Oakridge. At the station, Ferguson placed a gasoline canister inside a dumpster and a second canister next to its eastern wall, before igniting them with incense sticks. Sprinting back to his borrowed Subaru, he scattered nails in the driveway to slow down firefighters. Before returning the car to his friend, Ferguson changed the tires, throwing away the old ones to prevent the treads from being traced. By daybreak, the Oakridge Ranger Station had burned to the ground.

The arson threw Eugene's environmental community into an uproar. Small-scale sabotage, like pouring sugar into a bulldozer's gas tank, had always been part of radical-environmentalist culture. But arson was something different. Besides destroying the structure itself — an estimated \$5 million loss — the fire also consumed decades of forest-related data collected by naturalists and biologists. The fire blazed so hot that, weeks after the attack, when the staff opened a safe, admitting oxygen, papers stored inside burst into flames. Many activists felt that, while the U.S. Forest Service might be complicit with the timber industry, the arson squandered much of the good will generated by the Warner Creek victory. The Sierra Club offered a reward for information that led to the arsonists' capture.

Committing himself completely to ecological sabotage, Tubbs quit his aboveground activism and took a job at a market-research company. Many of Tubbs's companions in ELF actions were veterans of Warner Creek, including Joseph Dibee, whose technical expertise made him an invaluable ally. After months of planning, on July 21, 1997, the Elves gathered in the Oregon desert several miles from the Cavel West Horse Rendering Plant. Every year, under a little-known federal program, thousands of wild horses were rounded up by the Bureau of Land Management and purchased, sometimes by buyers who would go on to sell them for slaughter. Cavel West killed as many as 500 horses a week, shipping the meat to Europe. For years, locals had complained about the plant — its sickening smell, the screams of the horses and the vast amount of blood it generated, which would sometimes overwhelm the sewer system and burble up through

storm drains. While Tubbs manned a police scanner in their getaway van, the rest of the team trudged through the night toward the plant, dressed in dark clothing and communicating with two-way radios. According to a court filing by the prosecution, Dabee drilled holes in the facility's walls, filled the hollows with a mixture of glycerin soap, diesel and gasoline — the group called this “vegan Jell-O” — and set timed igniters. After the plant was in flames, and before going their separate ways, everyone threw their clothes in a hole and doused them in acid.

A week later, Craig Rosebraugh, a vegan baker in Portland, found an odd-looking note in the mailbox of an activist group where he volunteered. The letter — which appeared to have been written with deliberate sloppiness — denounced the Cavel West plant's role in horse slaughter and claimed its destruction was the work of a new group of radical environmentalists. Believing the group wanted their message shared with the world, Rosebraugh released it to the media. For years, he would receive regular communications from the ELF, eventually becoming a kind of spokesman for the group. In subsequent communiqués, which mixed doom-laden prophecies of ecological disaster with furious demands for change, the group described its ethos in greater detail. “We are the burning rage of this dying planet,” began one, which was posted to the internet. “The war of greed ravages the Earth and species die out every day. ELF works to speed up the collapse of industry, to scare the rich and undermine the foundations of the state.” Property destruction, they explained, was a way of levying a kind of fine on despoiling nature — of, in effect, removing the profit motive from killing the planet — and arson was the simplest, cheapest method of extracting this tax.

ELF cells would eventually spread all over the country, but the Eugene group was the first and easily the most prolific. The group's methods were low-tech, but the precautions they took to avoid being caught were exhaustive. Security culture was big in Eugene, where activists were well versed in the government's infiltration of older radical movements. The group used email “dead drops,” a system that involved exchanging coded messages in the Drafts folder. Arsons were called “BBQs,” timing devices “hamburgers.” Supplies were purchased in cash or shoplifted, and, before every action, tools were scrubbed with ammonia to remove any genetic material. The Elves intentionally avoided socializing — many members, in fact, never met each other. The Eugene cell took pains to be less a formal organization than a loose collection of actions with an overlapping cast of activists. The Elves also adopted aliases to keep their identities secret. A couple of members had a romantic relationship that lasted years, during which they never learned each other's real names.

In the fall of 1998, the ELF took on its largest target. A resort in the mountains of Vail, Colo., was planning to clear more than 800 acres of forest to make way for new ski runs and roads, threatening the habitat of the Canada lynx. A coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, had fought the expansion in court but were denied an injunction to stop the logging. With the help of a young woman named Chelsea Gerlach, another Elf named William Rodgers devised a plan. On the night of Oct. 18, 1998, just before the logging was scheduled to begin, Rodgers ran across the mountain ridge, setting fire to the resort's buildings and ski lifts one by one. Soon, eight structures were aflame. There would have been nine, but Rodgers skipped a cabin after peeking inside and finding two sleeping hunters. Rodgers and Gerlach then drove to a library in Denver where Gerlach emailed Rosebraugh an anonymous communiqué. The resort had been destroyed, she explained, on behalf of the lynx.

Detective Greg Harvey's first day with the Eugene Police Department's Special Investigations Unit ended with a riot. It was June 18, 1999, and a march through downtown Eugene, led by hundreds of anarchists, escalated into mayhem when protesters began smashing windows and police officers responded with tear gas. The S.I.U. was founded specifically to address the threats posed by radical groups, whose crimes often required complex investigations. Since its inception in the 1970s, the S.I.U. had pursued student leftists, outlaw motorcycle gangs and white supremacists. In the 1990s, its focus shifted to crimes committed by the anarchist and radical environmental movements. When the arsons in Oregon began, the S.I.U. joined a working group with a half-dozen other law-enforcement agencies, including the F.B.I. and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, to crack the case. Authorities were convinced it was only a matter of time before the fires accidentally killed someone or the perpetrators escalated to deadly violence.

Harvey and his colleagues began by establishing a network of confidential informants among the radical environmentalists. But who was behind the ELF was just as much a mystery to the activist community as it

was to the police, so Harvey decided to go undercover. As he attended gatherings of college students and crust punks in the Whiteaker neighborhood, wearing a dirty wig from a Halloween costume of Jesus, he gradually assembled a map of the activist community. He scoured anarchist zines, trying to learn everything he could about the tenets of radical environmentalism.

The F.B.I. had promised swift justice for Vail, but a year on, the case had stalled. Agency analysts had tried monitoring the phone traffic of activists, seeing who was calling whom, on the assumption the ELF could be taken down like a drug gang. But as Harvey — who had grudgingly come to admire the Elves' discipline — expected, this yielded next to nothing. Harvey's counterpart at the F.B.I., Special Agent John Ferreira, was also getting frustrated. A minor legend within the Bureau, Ferreira had worked cases involving the Bonnano crime family and the Japanese Yakuza. And from the beginning, Ferreira had been fixated on one suspect: Josephine Overaker.

During a routine canvas after the Detroit arson, police had discovered Overaker's address book in a nearby phone booth. Further suspicion fell on Overaker after she was arrested in Tacoma for shoplifting sponges — an ingredient in several of the ELF's devices — shortly before a nearby fire. Investigators had noticed Overaker at protests, and Ferreira became convinced she was involved in Vail. Yet all his evidence was still circumstantial, and after several years, the ELF was beginning to look uncatchable. As Ferreira put it to one reporter, "They kicked our butts."

The ELF, meanwhile, was facing its own setbacks. Vail had made them a household name — the attack even became a plot point on "The West Wing." But a feeling was simmering within the group that they weren't accomplishing much. The fires failed to spark a larger social movement. While the media focused on the spectacle of the fires, it mostly ignored the reasons they were lit. Some targets were being rebuilt with insurance money. More than that, the arsons didn't seem to have had an impact on the financial calculations of the industries they had targeted.

William Rodgers, who was a particularly outspoken and influential member of the group, decided the ELF needed to scale up. He set about recruiting more members, and the Eugene cell soon doubled in size. Rodgers also started to hold meetings — called "book clubs" — intended to spread the group's methods. Rodgers, along with a quiet man named Stan Meyerhoff, wrote and published a manual for building incendiary devices, and posted it to the internet. But as the cell expanded and took on more actions, it began to lose some of its original discipline. In May 1999, during an attack on a meat company in Eugene, someone placed an incendiary device next to a natural-gas line, risking an immense explosion. In September 2000, several members of the group tried, unsuccessfully, to set fire to a Eugene police substation, a target bearing little obvious connection to the environment. A few months later, a team torched Superior Lumber in Glendale, Ore., issuing a communiqué that labeled the timber company a "typical Earth raper." The arson gave some Elves pause. Superior was a small, family-owned business and its town's biggest employer. Such an action seemed unlikely to win much sympathy.

These disagreements underscored a contradiction in the ELF's approach, namely that the group saw itself as the vanguard of a revolution, when in fact it was all alone. As Andreas Malm notes, many largely peaceful social movements have, in the past, included a radical flank that engaged in more aggressive tactics. Indeed, some movements that are now all but universally admired involved more violence and property destruction than we like to remember. Suffragists smashed windows. During the Civil Rights era, Black residents of segregated Northern cities burned down buildings. Even Nelson Mandela, as head of the militant wing of the African National Congress, took part in a campaign of bombing unoccupied government buildings. Yet all were wedded to larger political movements, with specific aims, for which sabotage was but one form of pressure. The ELF's fires, Malm has observed, existed in a political void.

The ELF disdained the mainstream Washington-based environmental groups, and the feeling seemed to be mutual. Many, including Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund and the Sierra Club — which offered cash rewards on several occasions for information leading to the capture of eco-saboteurs — made statements denouncing property destruction. The executive director of Greenpeace USA declared that peaceful civil disobedience was a cornerstone of the organization's philosophy, citing Nelson Mandela as a model.

On June 16, 2000, two activists, Jeffrey Luers and Craig Marshall, set fire to three pickup trucks at the Romania Chevrolet dealership in Eugene, unaware they were being tailed by Detective Greg Harvey. The two men were arrested, with Marshall pleading guilty and Luers going to trial. As a show of solidarity, the Elves decided to strike Romania a second time. On March 30, 2001, a small crew crept into the dealership in the middle of the night. While Rodgers waited in a van and Tubbs stood lookout, Stan Meyerhoff and another ELF member placed kitty-litter pans under the vehicles and filled them with fuel, linking them together with gasoline-soaked linens scored from thrift stores. By dawn, 35 S.U.V.s had been torched. A communiqué dedicated the action to Luers.

The ELF's arson seemed to have an unforeseen effect. Luers was found guilty and, for the crime of setting fire to three trucks and another attempted arson, received a sentence of more than 22 years, the longest ever handed down for what was then a relatively new concept: eco-terrorism. For years, the phrase "eco-terrorism" had more often been used to describe violence against the natural world than vandalism committed in its name. When Saddam Hussein dumped millions of gallons of oil into the Persian Gulf, President George H.W. Bush denounced it as an act of "environmental terrorism." Yet, by the mid-90s, conservatives had begun warning of the eco-terrorism perpetrated by radical environmentalists. News outlets, including The New York Times, regularly described the ELF as terrorists — despite the fact, as activists pointed out, that the ELF had never killed anyone.

Some members of the Eugene cell, wanting retribution, doubled down. Early on May 21, 2001, Elves torched two structures and 18 vehicles on a tree farm in Clatskanie, Ore. That same night, 150 miles north, flames devoured an office building on the University of Washington's campus in Seattle. The ELF's communiqué explained that the motive for the twin attacks was the "ecological nightmare" of genetic engineering. But the arsons were based on false information; neither target was nearly as involved in G.M.O. research as the Elves believed.

These misadventures widened rifts, ideological and personal, that had been slowly growing within the group. With early idealism wearing off, it became clear that not everyone in the group believed the same things about why they were setting fires. The Elves had initially agreed on the necessity of a new tactic, but when it became clear the tactic wasn't working, their philosophical differences became insurmountable. At a "book club" meeting soon after the double arson, one attendee raised the possibility of escalating to physical violence, even assassinations. Others — who had joined the ELF because of its commitment to preserving life — were repulsed. On Sept. 5, 2001, after a disagreement with an Elf over an unapproved edit to a communiqué, Rosebraugh stepped down as the group's putative spokesman.

A week later, Chelsea Gerlach was sitting in a hotel room, preparing to reconnoiter a potential target, when she saw on TV that a pair of planes had crashed into the World Trade Center. Hours after the towers fell, Representative Don Young, a Republican from Alaska, suggested there was "a strong possibility" that radical environmentalists were behind the hijackings.

The attacks transformed the F.B.I. overnight. The bureau had been founded in the early 20th century as a law-enforcement agency, but after Sept. 11, its central mission, underwritten by expansive new congressional funding, became counterterrorism. Over the next few years, the F.B.I. turned ever more attention to property destruction committed by environmental activists. While most of this pressure was directed toward radical environmentalists, it also opened terrorism investigations into members of mainstream groups like Greenpeace and PETA for their potential involvement in ecological sabotage. In 2002, James Jarboe, chief of the F.B.I.'s domestic-terrorism division, declared to Congress that the investigation of animal rights extremists and eco-terrorists was the bureau's highest domestic-terrorism priority. This period in the environmental movement — marked by aggressive police tactics and tough new punishments for crimes ostensibly committed in defense of the earth — was one that some activists would come to call the Green Scare.

Exactly why the F.B.I. made eco-terrorism a central concern remains a subject of debate. Some have speculated it was because of corporate pressure. According to the reporting by The Intercept, industry trade groups had been directly pushing the Justice Department to pursue eco-sabotage cases since the 1980s. Yet F.B.I. officials contend that the fixation on the ELF stemmed, in part, from the trauma of Sept.

11. Fearful of being blindsided a second time, the bureau sought to make up for the failure of imagination that had led them to miss signs of an imminent attack from Al Qaeda. There was a conviction that, even if the ELF had so far only targeted buildings, it was just a matter of time before the group began attacking people.

“The question after Sept. 11,” James Jarboe told me, “was ‘Who else wants body bags?’”

By early 2003, the leads had dried up in the ELF investigation. The group had been quiet for almost two years, and the main person of interest, Overaker, was off the grid. It was then that Kirk Engdall, a federal prosecutor in Eugene, decided to try a new strategy. Engdall, who was assigned to the Justice Department’s domestic-terrorism squad, had been obsessed with the ELF case for years. On his wall, he kept a poster of the burning Oakridge Ranger Station. Instead of casting a wide net, Engdall suggested, why not take a meticulous “cold case” approach to a single arson, one that occurred just blocks from his office: Romania Chevrolet.

For the next six months, investigators turned over every clue related to the S.U.V. fires, looking for anything they had missed. Finally, they noticed something unusual. The day after the Romania fire, an activist known as Sparrow had walked into a Eugene police station and asked for an incident report about the arson. Told it was confidential, she then asked for a second report, concerning a stolen truck, taken on the night of the fire. This was a red flag: Investigators assumed a truck had been used to haul fuel for the arson. The second report, about the stolen truck, had been filed by a woman who suggested that the theft had been committed by her neighbor — a man named Jacob Ferguson. (Investigators believed that Sparrow requested the reports in order to figure out how much the police knew.) John Ferreira, meanwhile, had long been interested in Ferguson because of a woman he had dated: Josephine Overaker.

With Ferguson now their main suspect, investigators sought evidence linking him to Romania. For the next six months, Harvey, still in his Jesus-wig disguise, followed Ferguson constantly, up to 14 hours a day. Ferreira and Engdall brought Ferguson in for questioning and presented him with evidence that he had perjured himself when speaking to federal investigators — he’d claimed not to know Overaker — which carried a five-year penalty. According to Harvey, they also bluffed, hinting they had enough evidence to charge him for arson and send him to prison for a long time. Still, Ferguson resisted. The investigators knew that Ferguson had a son born during the Warner Creek occupation, and they knew that his father had spent time in prison when Ferguson was a child. Did he really want his own son to grow up without a dad?

In 2004, Ferguson made a plea deal: little to no jail time in exchange for full cooperation. The government also agreed to pay for heroin-addiction treatment. At the time, investigators still didn’t know the extent of Ferguson’s involvement in the ELF. When Ferguson told them he had participated in over a dozen arsons, they were stunned. (The Romania S.U.V. arson, in fact, was one of the few in which Ferguson played no role.) Investigators were surprised again when Ferguson started naming his associates, most of whom they had never heard of. Harvey assumed Ferguson’s colleagues would be like him — in a word, “punks” — not college-educated people with jobs.

After Ferguson came on board, the F.B.I. designated the ELF investigation a major case, branding it Operation Backfire, freeing up more money and resources. Dozens of agents were soon working the case, with President Bush said to be receiving regular briefings on their progress. Ferguson also reluctantly agreed to wear a wire, and the agency started flying him around the country, arranging for him to bump into his former ELF colleagues, most of whom had moved away. Ferguson soon showed up in Portland, where Chelsea Gerlach worked as a D.J., and a college in Virginia, where Stan Meyerhoff was taking engineering classes. The one person who Ferguson refused to tape, at first, was Kevin Tubbs. It would be, he told investigators, like betraying a sibling. Harvey and Ferreira tried to assure Ferguson he was doing the right thing. They also reminded him he’d only received immunity in exchange for full cooperation.

The arrests happened in two main waves, the first in December 2005, the second a month later. In total, 19 Elves were charged in connection with 20 incidents, causing over \$40 million in damage. In the indictments, prosecutors referred to the group ominously as “The Family,” a name, with its mobbish and

Mansonian connotations, that was seldom, if ever, used by the ELF. The F.B.I. director, Robert Mueller, announced the arrests at a televised news conference. “Terrorism is terrorism,” Mueller said, “no matter what the motive.”

The backlash against environmental sabotage, meanwhile, was continuing to intensify. In 2006, the House of Representatives passed a bill that meant environmental activists could spend up to 20 years in prison for property destruction, based on language provided by the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, a group known for drafting laws with the input of major industries and lobbying for them in Congress. Later that year, a version of the bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support. By 2007, 30 state legislatures had passed statutes specifically addressing eco-terrorism, many also drafted by ALEC. Republicans used the attacks to scold and chasten mainstream environmentalists.

At his sentencing in 2007, Tubbs began by apologizing for his role in the fires. He had come to realize, he told the court, that arson was both reckless and politically ineffective. But, Tubbs continued, the ELF was born of desperation. Mass extinction, deforestation, eroding soils and melting ice shelves — climate change, he said, would soon bring with it an Old Testament plague of droughts and floods. The actions he had taken, Tubbs acknowledged, were wrong, but they were also a reprieve from overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, despair and cynicism. More than that, though, the fires, he said, were lit to raise an alarm about the state of the world.

“It’s as if the ecological destruction and the cataclysmic events that follow it are a huge train bearing down on us, and we are asleep on the tracks,” Tubbs said, in tears. “I was just trying to do my part to help wake us up.”

Tubbs was sentenced to 12 years, seven months in prison. Chelsea Gerlach was sentenced to nine years. William Rodgers, meanwhile, ended his life while awaiting trial. Despite being the second person to cooperate, Stan Meyerhoff received the longest sentence, 13 years. The indictments also tore apart Eugene’s tight-knit environmentalist community. Activists had screaming fights about whether the Elves who spoke to investigators merited sympathy or shunning. The Earth First! Journal started — and still maintains — a website listing the case’s informants, including Tubbs, a former editor. The radical environmental movement slowly disintegrated. Operation Backfire was a resounding success.

On the day of the arrests in 2005, Joseph Dibee was served with a grand-jury subpoena. The F.B.I. asked him to come in, outlined the case they were mounting against him and asked him to help with their investigation. Dibee declined. Instead, prosecutors claim, Dibee enlisted a friend to drive him to Mexico. From there, Dibee flew to Beirut, then on to Syria. Several other Elves also fled the country before they could be arrested.

For more than a decade, Dibee was listed as one of the F.B.I.’s most wanted domestic terrorists. Yet, even in hiding, he continued with his environmental advocacy. In Syria, Dibee taught environmental engineering at a university while helping plan a national project on renewable energy. As the Syrian civil war escalated, Dibee fled to Russia, where he married and started a business recycling used fuels into biodiesel. When Dibee was finally arrested, he was coming home from the jungles of Ecuador, where he had agreed to build an ecologically friendly device for mining gold. By then, most of his fellow fugitives had already been caught. Even Jacob Ferguson ended up in prison, for heroin possession. Only Josephine Overaker remains at large.

Through his lawyer, Dibee first agreed to speak with me about his case, but later changed his mind. By way of explanation, he forwarded a link to a short New York Times story from 2009 with the headline “Fugitive Still Licensed to Fly by the F.A.A.” The Times article noted that, although the F.B.I. had accused Dibee of being a domestic terrorist and was offering a \$50,000 reward for information leading to his capture, he still held a valid U.S. pilot’s license. After the story ran, the F.A.A. revoked it. Last year, after catching Covid while in federal custody, Dibee was conditionally released on house arrest.

When I knocked on his door in Seattle, Dibee stepped briefly outside, and again politely but firmly declined to talk. Standing on his porch, Dibee looked worn down. His two years in jail had overlapped

with the summer of 2020, and the protests over George Floyd's murder had come right to his front door. One day, as Dibee was taken to the federal courthouse in downtown Portland to review documents for his case, the clashes outside became so intense that police deployed tear gas. Whether the demonstrations — and the vast amount of property destroyed in Floyd's name — led to any substantive political change is a question that will be debated for decades. For Dibee, the immediate effect was that the tear gas triggered his asthma.

That same summer, while Dibee was in lockup, 3,000 square miles of Oregon and Washington were burned by wildfires. The infernos consumed over 4,000 homes and other structures, including a cattle ranch, a gas station and a timber mill — precisely the kind of symbols of environmental degradation that the Earth Liberation Front had targeted. Now, though, there was no one to take credit, no one to hunt down, no one to put behind bars.

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Sandstorm wave sweeps Middle East
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/sand-storms-middle-east-climate-change/
GIST	<p>On Monday, a bright orange glow bathed the streets of Kuwait City, like a wildfire without flames. In Tehran, the tip of the Milad Tower, the tallest structure in the city, could barely be seen. In Mosul, Iraq, a wall of dust blotted out the skyline. Further south, bridges disappeared into the haze.</p> <p>At least one dust storm began on Monday in Iraq and traveled to Saudi Arabia, satellite imagery showed. NASA data showed dust reaching more than three miles into the sky, said Hiren Jethva, a Morgan State University and NASA scientist. The dust layer thinned over Saudi Arabia on Thursday and migrated toward the Red Sea.</p> <p>More than 1,000 people were hospitalized across Iraq with respiratory problems as of Monday, Health Ministry spokesman Seif al-Badr told Agence France-Presse. The Iraqi government declared a national holiday Monday to keep people in their homes.</p> <p>Flights were grounded briefly in Kuwait for the second time this month. Officials warned drivers in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, to move slowly. Schools and government offices in Tehran were closed last week, and hundreds of people in southern Iran sought medical help for troubled breathing and flights were delayed, the Associated Press reported.</p> <p>Sand and dust storms, known as haboobs, have always been a feature of life in the Middle East, a region known for its deserts. The storms ramp up in the late spring and summer as seasonal winds blowing from the northwest, known as the “shamal,” kick up dust from the Tigris-Euphrates basin and transport it to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.</p> <p>But experts say the storms this year are particularly intense, as climate change and desertification increase their frequency. In Iraq, at least nine significant storms have hit the country since April. More are likely to materialize in the summer and, without major policy changes, could continue to get worse in years to come.</p> <p>“We have had many more dust storms this spring than in the past,” said Salam Abdulrahman, a lecturer at the University of Human Development in Iraq, said in an email. “Every dust storm has lasted from one day to 2-3 days. Previous dust storms were shorter.”</p> <p>Benjamin Cook, an environmental scientist at Columbia University's Climate School, said three elements are needed for a sandstorm to take off: wind, a source of dust where there is little to no vegetation, and very dry conditions.</p>

The recent storms in Iraq have stemmed in part from a lack of rain, water-flow issues and human activity. 2020-21 was the second-driest rainfall season in 40 years, resulting in crop failure. Conditions remain poor. In most of the country, groundwater storage, used for crop irrigation and drinking water, is near its lowest levels compared with long-term records, [according to NASA data](#).

The limited water stunts vegetation growth, which loosens the surface for dust storms, said Abdulrahman. He said some locals in Iraq now refer to the dust storm activity as “soilfall” or “earthfall,” because the winds kick up layers of soil.

Wetlands in southern Iraq and Iran, where many people make a living off the land, are drying up.

Ismael al Ameri, a research fellow at Birkbeck, University of London, said the near-disappearance of Al Sawa, a salt lake about 150 miles south of Baghdad, will leave a new source of mud, silt and salt for sandstorms. The construction of dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has added to the problem, he said, and more broadly, military operations in Iraq since 2003 have also damaged topsoil layers.

In Iran and Iraq, the storms are also connected to farming practices in the region and the mismanagement of shared rivers, said Banafsheh Keynoush, a nonresident scholar with the Middle East Institute’s Iran program.

The conditions driving dust storms have been exacerbated by human-caused climate change. The Middle East is heating up about twice as quickly as the rest of the world, which has [warmed](#) by about 2.3 degrees Fahrenheit since the preindustrial era.

The hotter temperatures, paired with increasing water-supply issues, prime the desert region for more dust storms.

“These climate extremes are widely reported as clear indicators of climate change,” said al Ameri, who has [previously written](#) on the subject. “This is combined with an increase in storm recurrence activity, not only in spring and summer, but in autumn and winter too.”

An Iraqi environmental ministry official said the country’s dusty days have increased from 243 to 272 days a year over two decades, according to data from the General Authority for Meteorology. He said Iraq could face nearly 300 days of dust storms per year by 2050, the Iraqi News Agency [reported](#).

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi told his cabinet this month that the dust storms illustrate the effects of climate change and that “urgent measures” must be taken, according to a [readout](#) of the meeting.

Abdulrahman said that the dust storms lead to more water consumption, exacerbating shortages. “After every dust storm, people need to wash their house, yard, cars and trees and plants they have in their gardens,” he said.

The eerie orange skies and streets coated with sand come at a serious cost, as workers are forced to stay home, governments must invest in response and mitigation measures, factories close and flights are grounded. Dust storms also damage crops and deplete fertile soil. The United Nations estimates the Middle East and North Africa lose about \$13 billion in gross domestic product every year due to these storms.

They also come at a cost to health. Sandstorm exposure can cause cough, runny nose, asthma attacks, eye irritation and other [problems](#). In addition to natural particles, the storms carry harmful pollutants. Elderly people, children and individuals with respiratory illnesses, heart problems and other preexisting conditions are particularly vulnerable, the Iraqi government has warned.

The hospitalizations in Iraq on Monday came two weeks after a storm sent at least 4,000 people to the hospital with breathing issues. Another dust storm earlier in May led to a death, [according to Agence France-Presse](#). Three people have died and hundreds were hospitalized in the province of Deir al-Zour in

eastern Syria due to a sandstorm earlier this month, [the Associated Press reported](#). Hospitals were on standby again there this week as the latest storm hit the area.

The Saudi Food and Drug Authority on Tuesday [called on people to wear masks](#) and refrain from eating food exposed to the open air to protect themselves from harmful particles carried by the storms.

Planting trees and other vegetation represents one solution. During the Dust Bowl in the United States in the 1930s, the federal government planted millions of trees to stop soil from continuing to blow across the Great Plains. These “shelterbelts” or “green belts” reduce soil erosion and preserved moisture in the soil.

Saudi Arabia plans to plant 10 billion trees in the next decades to reduce its carbon footprint and land degradation. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman unveiled a “Middle East Green Initiative” last year, hailed by the United Nations, to work with other Arab countries to plant 40 billion more in the region.

Iran, a regional rival, has spent 450 million euros (\$483 million) over the past three years to mitigate sandstorm hot spots in the country by planting trees, stabilizing soil, constructing windbreaks and other measures, [according to the Tehran Times](#).

Iraq has been experimenting with the strategy for more than a decade, planting eucalyptus and olive trees and date palms as part of a plan to shield the central city of Karbala, one of Iraq’s Shiite holy cities. But construction delays, funding shortages and neglect contributed to the project’s failure, [Agence France-Press reported](#). Some blame financial mismanagement.

The cabinet on May 10 directed the Finance Ministry to disburse some \$2 million to implement a project to stabilize sand dunes, the Iraqi News Agency reported.

Governments in the region have invested in early-warning and monitoring systems for sandstorms, Keynough said.

But regional governments should take stronger collective action to address the problem, she said. “We need to be a step ahead of sandstorms rather than sandstorms being a step ahead of us.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Centralia cemetery cleanup surprise graves
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/centralia-cemetery-restoration-reveals-additional-graves/281-2b1df171-0a45-403f-aa5a-386802af2254
GIST	<p>CENTRALIA, Wash. — Marveen Rohr helped change state law and secured state funding to clean and preserve the estimated 2,000 gravesites at Greenwood Cemetery, where her parents and grandparents are buried.</p> <p>But after three years of clearing weeds and accessing cemetery records, volunteers have identified more than 7,000 gravesites at the Centralia property, some marking the remains of men who fought in the Civil War.</p> <p>"That's when we started to understand that we are sitting on a history lesson... It kinda takes you on this trip, you know what I mean? We're talking about when Abraham Lincoln was president," Rohr said.</p> <p>"I think this was probably a lost battalion so to speak," said Ed Day.</p> <p>The original owners of Greenwood abandoned the property in 2007 and for more than a decade, due to state law, family members of those buried on the property risked trespassing charges if they visited their loved ones.</p> <p>As a result, weeds and moss overtook many of the tombstones.</p>

	<p>In 2019 Rohr helped change state laws regarding abandoned cemeteries and helped the City of Centralia get nearly \$500,000 in grant funding to pay for the cleanup.</p> <p>“This is the kind of work we should be doing as a community, together,” said Rohr.</p> <p>Restoring all of the gravesites may require more state funding. Volunteers are planning to rededicate the cemetery on Saturday, just in time for Memorial Day.</p> <p>Day, a Marine, who fought in the Vietnam War, spent Thursday placing flags at fellow veterans' gravesites, including some that were recently identified.</p> <p>“They just need a little respect,” said Day.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Secret US plans for apocalyptic scenarios
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/us/internet-president-emergency-orders.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Newly disclosed documents have shed a crack of light on secret executive branch plans for apocalyptic scenarios — like the aftermath of a nuclear attack — when the president may activate wartime powers for national security emergencies.</p> <p>Until now, public knowledge of what the government put into those classified directives, which invoke emergency and wartime powers granted by Congress or otherwise claimed by presidents, has been limited to declassified descriptions of those developed in the early Cold War. In that era, they included steps like imposing martial law, rounding up people deemed dangerous and censoring news from abroad.</p> <p>It has not been clear what is in the modern directives — known as presidential emergency action documents — because under administrations of both parties, none have been made public or shown to Congress. But the newly disclosed documents, which relate to the George W. Bush administration’s efforts to revise the draft orders after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, offer clues.</p> <p>Several of the files, provided to The New York Times by the Brennan Center for Justice, show that the Bush-era effort partly focused on a law that permits the president to take over or shut down communications networks in wartime. That suggests the government may have developed or revised such an order in light of the explosive growth in the 1990s of the consumer internet.</p> <p>Underscoring how little lawmakers and the public can infer, another file, from the summer of 2008, mentioned that Justice Department lawyers were revising an unidentified draft order in light of a recent Supreme Court opinion. The memo does not specify the ruling, but the court had just issued landmark decisions on topics that could relate to government actions in an emergency — one about gun rights in the United States and another about the rights of Guantánamo detainees to court hearings.</p> <p>“The bottom line is that these documents leave no doubt that the post-9/11 emergency actions documents have direct and significant implications for Americans’ civil liberties,” said Elizabeth Goitein of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. “And yet, there is no oversight by Congress. And that’s unacceptable.”</p> <p>Even though it is unclear how the directives have evolved since the later stages of the Cold War, Ms. Goitein said they have likely expanded to include other scenarios beyond a devastating nuclear attack. The documents show that later versions extended from one category to seven, although their topics remain secret, and fall within the jurisdiction of agencies with different areas of focus.</p> <p>The newly disclosed documents show that there were 48 of the directives when the Bush administration took office; by 2008, that number had grown to 56. Vice President Dick Cheney’s office was involved in reviewing and “clearing” the orders. The documents do not indicate any consultation with Congress.</p>

Several Bush administration officials whose names were mentioned in the documents, speaking on background to discuss matters that remain classified, portrayed the effort as bureaucratic “good housekeeping.” It seemed prudent as the government reoriented to focus on national security after the Sept. 11 attacks, they said.

The Brennan Center for Justice, which has [gathered materials about the presidential emergency action documents](#), obtained the files under the Freedom of Information Act from the Bush presidential library. The disclosures constituted about 500 pages, while about 6,000 more pages were withheld as classified. The disclosures come after the House [passed a bill](#) in December that would impose significant curbs on executive power after the Trump years, including a provision that would require disclosure of the emergency action documents to congressional overseers.

The bill, called the Protecting Our Democracy Act, is not expected to pass the Senate, where Republicans can block it with a filibuster. But advocates of imposing some new limits on presidential emergency powers, with [some bipartisan support](#), are discussing trying later this year to attach a portion to an annual defense authorization act that is considered “must pass” legislation.

It is not yet clear whether the provision about emergency action documents would be included in any such step. But Senator Edward J. Markey, Democrat of Massachusetts, who drafted the provision as stand-alone legislation in 2020, said Congress has an opportunity to bring some accountability to the emergency planning.

“It’s our duty as lawmakers to demand that the executive branch turn over documents so Congress, as representatives of the American people, can evaluate the constitutionality of any future president’s attempt to exploit an emergency to assume extraordinary powers,” he said in a statement provided to The Times. Mr. Markey [proposed his bill](#) after President Donald J. Trump claimed [he wielded “total” authority](#) in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic and declared a national emergency.

More is public about 1950s and 1960s versions of the draft emergency action orders because some have been mentioned or described in memos that have since been declassified. For example, [they included directives](#) imposing versions of martial law, censoring information crossing the border and suspending court hearings for detained people. It is unclear whether the current set includes similar actions.

Another early emergency action order, from the 1950s, was readied to create military zones prohibiting certain categories of people. The directive echoed how the government barred Japanese and Japanese Americans from large swaths of the West Coast during World War II, leading to their internment. In 1967, the Justice Department recommended dropping that one, [a memo declassified in 2019 shows](#).

“The broad-scale criticism of the Japanese relocation program is well-known and well-founded,” the 1967 memo stated, adding: “It is open to serious question whether any similar program should be authorized which would permit the removal or detention of American citizens as a group based solely on their race, religion or national origin.”

Other orders from that era included a declaration that a state of war existed, a directive to arrange for reconvening Congress at a secure site, and the creation of an agency empowered to impose sweeping controls over the economy. That agency, reporting to the president, could enact controls like requisitioning private property and allocating materials; imposing wage, price and rent controls; rationing; and settling labor disputes.

For several years, the Obama-era Justice Department [mentioned in budget documents](#) submitted to Congress that its Office of Legal Counsel in 2012 had begun to review the legality of the 56 presidential emergency action documents. In 2017, the Trump Justice Department repeated that reference in [its own budget request](#), after which it fell out of the annual submissions.

	But subsequent budget documents have not disclosed what further changes, if any, the Obama and Trump administration made to them.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/27 Fed agent knew Buffalo shooter's plans?
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/buffalo-shooting-federal-agent-knew-shooters-plans-investigation
GIST	<p>Federal officials investigating the deadly Buffalo grocery store shooting are trying to find out if a retired federal agent from Texas, who reportedly talked to the alleged shooter online frequently, was one of a handful of people who knew about the shooting about 30 minutes before the attack was carried out.</p> <p>Payton Gendron, 18, invited around 30 people in a chatroom devoted to racism to read his White supremacist ramblings and then showed them his plans less than an hour before he went to Tops Supermarket and allegedly killed 10 Black people, according to The Buffalo News.</p> <p>The unnamed retired agent from an unnamed agency was reportedly among those invited to see Gendron's plans, but it's unclear if he accepted, two law enforcement officials told the newspaper.</p> <p>The former agent and six others suspected of regularly chatting with Gendron on the forum could potentially be charged as accomplices. The FBI is attempting to find and interview them.</p> <p>The FBI has confirmed that no officials were warned by any individuals of what the alleged shooter planned to do before the attack, an official said.</p> <p>"These were like-minded people who used this chat group to talk about their shared interests in racial hatred, replacement theory and hatred of anyone who is Jewish, a person of color or not of European ancestry," one of the officials told the Buffalo News. "What is especially upsetting is that these six people received advanced notice of the Buffalo shooting, about 30 minutes before it happened."</p> <p>He added, "The FBI has verified that none of these people called law enforcement to warn them about the shooting. The FBI database shows no advance tips from anyone that this shooting was about to happen."</p> <p>Officials say Gendron traveled from three hours away, specifically targeting Black shoppers in the store. John V. Elmore, a local civil rights attorney said, "If he had advance notice, he had a moral obligation to get on the phone and try to notify someone about it."</p> <p>He represents the family of Andre Mackniel, 53, who was one of the 10 people killed in the attack. He was buying a birthday cake for his 3-year-old son.</p> <p>The six people who could potentially face charges may have been among 15 people in the chatroom who accepted Gendron's invitation to review his plans and watch him live-stream the attack on Twitch.</p>
Return to Top	

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Pro-abortion group vandalizes churches
SOURCE	https://www.deseret.com/faith/2022/5/26/23142907/pro-abortion-group-claims-acts-of-vandalism-latter-day-saint-chapel-washington-churches-lds
GIST	An abortion rights group has claimed responsibility for vandalizing four anti-abortion churches, including a meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in Olympia, Washington, according to the Washington Free Beacon .

	<p>A group calling itself “Pudget Sound Anarchists” shared an anonymous website post that took credit for spray-painting threatening messages — “facelifts” — on a Latter-day Saint church, two evangelical churches and a Catholic church for their “ties to anti-abortion ‘crisis pregnancy centers.’”</p> <p>“We dumped red paint over the entryways and left messages of ‘If abortions aren’t safe, then neither are you,’ ‘Abort the church,’ and ‘God loves abortion,’” the anarchists wrote in the post. “We are not appealing to state power for an end to patriarchal violence, but threatening: ‘If abortions aren’t safe, then neither are you.’”</p> <p>A member of the Latter-day Saint congregation said they found the graffiti Sunday morning, took photos of it and pressure washed it off, according to thejoltnews.com.</p> <p>The same group also accepted accountability for vandalizing at least three other anti-abortion organizations since news broke about a leaked draft U.S. Supreme Court ruling that shows the justices overturning Roe v. Wade, LifeNews.com reported.</p> <p>Similar acts of vandalism by different perpetrators happened at Catholic churches in Fort Collins and Boulder, Colorado, according to the Coloradoan, and Denver Post.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Victims of the school shooting in Texas
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/25/uvalde-texas-school-shooting-victims/
GIST	<p>The students were 9, 10 or 11 years old, the teachers in their 40s. Some children had just made the honor roll. Two of the girls played basketball together on a team called the Spurs. One boy loved soccer and dancing with his brothers at home. The veteran teachers were long accustomed to teaming up in their fourth-grade classroom. One was an expert in special education and remembered for her dedication to a student with Down syndrome.</p> <p>The names of those slain by a gunman at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Tex., on Tuesday — including at least 19 children and two teachers — emerged in the days after, as the grief-stricken community of 16,000 about 80 miles west of San Antonio tried to process what happened. An additional 17 people were wounded in the attack. Just before summer break, an 18-year-old opened fire in a classroom, unleashing carnage not seen at a U.S. school in nearly a decade.</p> <p>Here is what we know so far about those who died in the attack.</p> <p>Eva Mireles, 44</p> <p>Eva Mireles, an educator for 17 years, taught fourth-graders at Robb Elementary School, according to family members. In a heart-wrenching tribute on Twitter, Mireles’s daughter, Adalynn Ruiz, praised her mother’s heroism, and talked about how “outgoing and funny” Mireles was.</p> <p>She spoke directly to her mother, expressing anguish about all the things — big and small — she would miss: the calluses on her hands from CrossFit workouts, the way she talked to the family dogs, reenacting TikToks to drive Ruiz’s father crazy, the way she could rouse her mom from a nap for on-call cooking advice, the way she would call her daughter every weekday at 4:30 p.m., when she typically left campus.</p> <p>“I want everything back,” she wrote. “I want you to come back to me mom.”</p> <p>Mireles’s husband, Ruben Ruiz, is a school police officer, and her mother-in-law works in the district’s central office, according to Lydia Martinez Delgado, who is the mother-in-law’s sister. Martinez Delgado said her sister relayed to her that Ruiz rushed to the elementary school when he heard reports of the shooting and entered the building, then he saw it was his wife’s classroom.</p> <p>He tried to enter but had to be held back by other officers, Martinez Delgado said she was told. Eventually, Ruiz returned to his mother’s office, where they got the news that Mireles was dead.</p>

Martinez Delgado said Mireles was cheerful and active, and recalled a time she got up before sunrise with other relatives for a hike during a family gathering. “She did all she could to live a long life, and here it was cut short,” Martinez Delgado said in a phone interview early Wednesday.

Audrey Garcia said she will never forget the attention Mireles paid to her daughter Gabby, now 23, when she was in third grade.

“My daughter has Down syndrome, and she was one of the first students at that time to be included in a regular classroom,” said Garcia, who lives in San Antonio. “Ms. Mireles always went above and beyond. She never saw Gabby as having less potential than any of the other students.”

On Tuesday, Garcia posted a photo on Twitter of her daughter and Mireles that she said demonstrated the teacher’s dedication. Garcia said she last heard from Mireles about two years ago, after a local television station did a story on her daughter’s graduation from high school and her new jewelry business. Mireles would often reach out around Christmas, Garcia said, because Gabby had given her an ornament as a gift.

“She would say that she always thought about Gabby when she put up her Christmas tree,” Garcia said. “After all those years, she still cared about Gabby as a student. I just want everyone to know what kind of person she was and what kind of educator she was. I don’t want her to be forgotten.”

Xavier Lopez, 10

The Lopez household was teeming with children’s laughter and music — and its source, more often than not, was 10-year-old Xavier Lopez cracking a joke or dancing cumbia.

But the giggles and grooving sounds that once filled the air were replaced Tuesday by the pain of a life cut short, Xavier’s family said. The fourth-grader at Robb Elementary School was among those slain during Tuesday’s shooting rampage, his mother, Felicha Martinez, told The Washington Post.

“He was funny, never serious, and his smile,” Martinez said, her voice breaking. “That smile I will never forget. It would always cheer anyone up.”

Xavier “was so full of life,” she said, and a bright light for the family. Never one to shy away from the camera, he would sway his hips, wave his arms and energetically dance in the house with his brothers — moments of glee that Martinez captured for her TikTok account.

At school, Xavier enjoyed sports — soccer and baseball — and had a great interest in art, his favorite subject, Martinez said.

“He loved any activity in which he could be creative and especially get to draw,” Martinez said.

Nearly finished with his last year of elementary school, Xavier was counting the days until he would officially move up the academic ladder into Flores Middle School in Uvalde. “He really couldn’t wait to go to middle school,” his mother said.

His dreams seemed so close on Tuesday at Robb Elementary’s honor roll ceremony. Martinez was there to cheer him on as Xavier’s name was called to receive his certificate.

Hours before the tragedy, Martinez snapped a photo of Xavier. She told him she was proud and that she loved him, before hugging him goodbye. She said she did not imagine that would be the last moment she would share with her “mama’s boy.”

Jose Flores, 10

Jose Flores, 10, was a fourth-grader at Robb Elementary who loved to play baseball, according to his uncle Christopher Salazar, who confirmed his nephew’s death.

“He was a very happy little boy. He loved both his parents ... and loved to laugh and have fun,” Salazar said.

He said his nephew, who had two brothers and a sister, “loved going to school.” On Tuesday, hours before the shooting, Jose had received an award for making the honor roll.

“He was very smart,” Salazar said. “He wasn’t a kid who would look for trouble.”

Irma Garcia, 48

Irma Garcia, a fourth-grade teacher at Robb Elementary, loved to cook and fish and teach youngsters how to read, said Jose Garcia, 19, one of her sons. She was wrapping up her 23rd year as a teacher — all of it spent at Robb — and she had won professional honors such as teacher of the year, her son said.

Jose Garcia said authorities confirmed his mother’s death on Tuesday evening.

“She treated her students as her own,” Jose Garcia said, recalling how his mother would rave about the children she was teaching at family dinners. He said his mother often decorated her classroom with college pennants, mascots and other items to inspire students to pursue higher education.

“She wanted to instill that in their brains,” he said. “They were her lifeblood. She loved engaging with children and teaching them. She loved her job and she loved her co-workers.”

John Martinez, 21, a nephew of Irma Garcia’s, said relatives will remember the beloved teacher as a hero. “They weren’t just her students,” he said Wednesday. “She lost her life to protect them. That’s the type of person she was.”

From year to year, her teaching assignments might vary among second, third or fourth grade. One year, Jose Garcia said, his mother was his third-grade teacher. Garcia said his mother and father, Joe Garcia, had four children — two sons and two daughters, ages 12 to 23 — and often hosted the extended family, including nieces, nephews and cousins, for holiday meals.

On Thursday, Joe Garcia died of an apparent heart attack, Martinez said.

“She loved, loved, loved cooking,” Jose Garcia said in a telephone interview Wednesday. “She’s the best cook I have ever known. She’d always love feeding everyone, the whole family.”

Menudo was one of her favorite dishes, he said, along with everyday meals such as breakfast tacos with potatoes, chorizo and eggs. She also loved fishing, the son said, sometimes joining her husband on a pier along the Gulf Coast.

She had been married for more than 24 years, according to a biography the teacher posted on a school website at the beginning of the academic year. “Hello Boys and Girls! Let me introduce myself,” Irma Garcia wrote. “I am Mrs. Garcia and I will be one of your 4th grade teachers this year. I am so excited to begin this new school year already! I want to share some fun facts about myself.”

Among those facts, she wrote: “I love to BBQ with my husband, listen to music, and take country cruises to Concan.” She also wrote that she had been co-teaching for five years with Eva Mireles, another teacher slain Tuesday.

Jose Garcia, who just finished his freshman year at Texas State University, said he woke up to a text from his mother on Tuesday morning. She asked whether he’d be interested in a job as a physical education coach during summer school. He replied yes. Then came the news of the shooting and lockdown and agonizing hours of waiting. “It was very incoherent yesterday,” he said, “the way the whole day played out. I started getting worried. I texted her and never got a response back.”

Martinez said Irma Garcia was a constant presence for him, filling his life with laughter, love and support. She was there at moments big and small, he said, recalling how she encouraged him to tackle a steep roller coaster at Universal Studios when he was a child. Martinez said he often wished he was older, closer to Garcia's age, so they could hang out, like friends.

"She was so funny and sweet," Martinez said. "She had this random-joke kind of humor. Whatever you wouldn't expect someone to say, she would say it." Now, Martinez said, the family is in shock, angry, struggling to understand that Garcia will not be coming home. "Honestly, we're all in shock. All of us are," he said. "I mean, wouldn't anyone be? In a circumstance like this?"

Nevaeh Bravo, 10

Austin Ayala said his cousin Nevaeh Bravo was one of the children killed in the shooting.

Nevaeh's family waited for hours to find out what happened, according to Ayala.

"We thought that she was missing, but lo and behold we heard late last night that she didn't make it," he said. "We were all devastated."

The girl celebrated her 10th birthday in January, Ayala said. He said her family is now trying to understand why a shooter killed this child who "put a smile on everyone's faces."

"It just feels like a nightmare that we cannot wake up from," he said. "Her siblings have to wake up every day knowing that she's not there with them."

Ellie Garcia, 9

Ellie Garcia loved her family. The second-oldest of five girls, the fourth-grader was always around her sisters. Ellie's father is a DJ, and the girl was constantly singing and dancing with her siblings to the cumbia — a type of Latin music — he'd play. Her great aunt, Siria Arizmendi, described Ellie as "spontaneous," saying the girl would break into song and dance at the family's frequent gatherings.

She didn't really care who you were," Arizmendi said. "If you showed her you cared for her, she was very loving to you."

Arizmendi said the family was full of love and she can't remember Ellie ever fighting with her sisters. She also had a close bond with her maternal grandmother.

Outside of family, Ellie was an athlete. A little tall for her age, the girl liked basketball the most. "She was just very happy," Arizmendi said.

The Garcia family spent Tuesday afternoon looking for Ellie. They went to the hospital, community places, searching for their daughter, Arizmendi said.

They learned of her death Tuesday evening, after authorities took DNA from parents to identify the fourth-grade victims.

Tess Mata, 10

Tess Mata was saving up. Her purple bedroom in Uvalde boasts a jar full of cash, which she was hoping to use for a family vacation to Disney World in Florida. She loved her family and spent as many milestone moments with them as possible — like her 10th birthday celebration in February at a San Antonio shopping center, or the college ring ceremony for her older sister Faith last year at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Tess, known by many as Tessy, was among those slain at Robb Elementary, relatives said.

In an interview, relatives said she loved TikTok dance videos, the Nickelodeon show “Victorious” starring Ariana Grande, and the discount store Five Below. Her favorite team? Easy. The Houston Astros. Near that jar of cash in her bedroom hangs a poster of Astros second baseman José Altuve.

“Every time he came up to bat, she would scream and yell for him,” said Tess’s mother, Veronica Mata, a kindergarten teacher at another school.

That was Tessy’s style. She was always positive. She rarely complained, her mom said.

“Her teachers would always say she was so nice and calm,” Veronica said.

Alexandria “Lexi” Rubio, 10

Lexi Rubio, 10, was a standout student and athlete who played basketball and softball, according to those who knew her.

Like Ellie Garcia, she was a member of the Spurs, a girls’ basketball team that won a local championship in March, the coach’s wife said. In a photo from that day, she stands beaming next to her teammates in a maroon and black uniform, a medal around her neck.

On Tuesday, her parents came to Robb Elementary to see her receive a certificate for making the honor roll, as well as a good citizen award, her mother, Kimberly Rubio, wrote in a Facebook post.

“We told her we loved her and would pick her up after school,” she wrote.

Lexi’s father, Felix Rubio, a deputy with the Uvalde County sheriff’s office, told CNN that he wants to see action on gun violence.

“All I can hope is that she’s just not a number,” he told the cable network, overcome by emotion. “This is enough. No one else needs to go through this.”

Jacklyn Cazares, 9

Javier Cazares said his 9-year-old daughter, Jacklyn, was shot at the school and died at a hospital.

Cazares said he rushed to the school when he heard about incident, but Jacklyn never emerged from the building. A short time later, Cazares’s niece happened to be at a hospital in the area and saw Jacklyn arrive in an ambulance, Cazares said. She died about 2½ hours after Cazares arrived at the hospital.

“She was full of life and she touched a lot of people,” Cazares said, describing his daughter as his “little firecracker.”

Jacklyn recently celebrated her First Communion, Cazares said.

“Through covid, through the death of a family member about a year ago, she brought us together in something beautiful,” Cazares said.

“It comforts me a little bit to think she would be the one to help her friends in need” at the school, he added.

Jailah Nicole Silguero, 10

Jailah Nicole Silguero was a bespectacled 10-year-old from Uvalde. Her death was confirmed in a brief obituary posted online by the Hillcrest Memorial Funeral Home, which said services for the fourth-grader will be held there at an unspecified date.

In a photo provided to the funeral home by her family, Jailah is frozen in time, looking at the camera with a hand on her hip and a pink lei around her neck. She is wearing a cheerleading uniform, the initials for Uvalde’s teams emblazoned on her chest in white and silver.

Jailah's mother, Veronica Luevanos, posted the obituary and funeral information on her Facebook page with the message: "I'm not ready for this," followed by a broken heart. Luevanos — who took to Facebook to ask others to help search for her daughter in the hours after that attack at Robb Elementary — has since turned her social media into a living memorial.

Throughout the night following the shooting, Luevanos posted updates: "I'm so heart broken," she wrote just before 3 a.m. Wednesday, changing her profile picture to an image of her daughter holding up a medal from the 2021 Turkey Trot footrace. Behind her in the photo, white angel wings spread outward and a glowing ladder of light runs beneath her feet. "My baby you didn't deserve this neither did your classmates," she wrote later. "R.I.P. my beautiful angel."

Jayce Luevanos, 10

Jayce Luevanos was among those slain, according to a Facebook post from his aunt and an interview his grandfather gave to USA Now.

Carmelo Quiroz said his grandson lived with him, and would make him a pot of coffee each morning.

"He was our baby," Quiroz said.

In a Facebook post, Veronica Luevanos — Jayce's aunt and mother of shooting victim Jailah Nicole Silguero — wrote over pictures of her daughter and his cousin: "My baby you didn't deserve this neither did your classmates."

Miranda Mathis, 11

Miranda Mathis was among those killed in her fourth-grade class, according to a family friend and a Facebook post by her cousin.

"My sweet baby cousin," Deanna Miller wrote on Facebook, "we loved u dearly I'm so sorry this happen to u baby."

Leslie Ruiz, a friend of Miranda's mother who had counseled her about the death, said in a message to The Post that Miranda was "fun" and "spunky." The 11-year-old was also "very smart," she said.

"She had manners," Ruiz wrote in a message. "She was a bright girl."

Miranda's best friend was her brother, Ruiz said, adding that the boy was also at the school when gunfire broke out in his sister's class.

Amerie Jo Garza, 10

Amerie Jo Garza was an honor-roll student, a proud big sister and an all-around good kid who brushed her teeth without a fuss and listened to her mother and teachers, family said.

Angel Garza, the girl's father, confirmed her death online and in a tearful interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper late Wednesday. After learning of his daughter's death, Garza posted photos of his daughter with the caption, "I will never be happy or complete again."

On Wednesday, as he spoke to Cooper standing in front of a line of yellow police tape, Garza clutched a framed picture of Amerie to his chest. In it, the dark-haired girl smiled as she held up her honor roll certificate.

Amerie was a cautious child, her father said. She was afraid of strangers and didn't like being left alone — even if it was only for a moment, while Garza stepped out of the car to fill it up with gas.

"She would lock the door," he said on CNN. "This is literally like her worst fear."

In her last moments, Garza said, Amerie tried to call for help. Garza, a first responder who arrived at the scene on Tuesday to render emergency medical aid to those inside the school, said he was treating a little girl covered in blood when the child told him her friend had been killed just as she called 911.

“She was hysterical, saying they shot her best friend, her best friend wasn’t breathing and she was just trying to call the cops,” Garza said through broken sobs. “I asked the little girl the name and she said, she told me Amerie.”

On Wednesday, Kimberly Garcia, the girl’s mother, posted a photo of her daughter posing with the honor roll certificate she had received just hours before the shooting.

“You did not deserve this my sweet baby girl,” Garcia wrote. “Mommy loves you, mommy can’t sleep without you. Mommy needs you, Amerie, I can’t do this life without you. How am I supposed to live life without you? I will never understand. I love you and I’ll never be the same, ever again.”

Makenna Lee Elrod, 10

Makenna Lee Elrod loved to dance and sing and “made friends everywhere she went,” an aunt told ABC News.

The aunt, Allison McCullough, confirmed to ABC that the 10-year-old was one of the victims in the Tuesday shooting. Another relative, who declined to be named, also confirmed Makenna’s death to The Post, and news of the family’s loss was circulating on social media.

“She was beautiful, funny, smart, and amazing,” McCullough wrote on a GoFundMe page that was seeking support for the family. “She had the biggest heart and loved her family and friends so much. Her smile would light up a room.”

Makenna’s father, Brandon Elrod, spoke with ABC on Tuesday afternoon amid the chaos in Uvalde. At the time, he was one of many frantic Robb Elementary parents searching for their children. He said, choking up, that he didn’t know “what this world’s coming to.”

Layla Salazar, 10

Layla Salazar, 10, was among those killed in the shooting Tuesday, according to a Facebook post from her father Vincent Salazar, who also confirmed her death to the Associated Press.

“Yesterday we lost our heart our whole world,” Salazar wrote. “We Love you Baby girl.”

The post was accompanied by photos of Layla holding first-place field day ribbons and smiling with her family. Salazar told the Associated Press that she won six races at the school’s field day, and on Thursday shared a video of his daughter racing with the caption, “run with the angels baby!”

He wrote that he and Layla would listen to “Sweet Child O’ Mine” by Guns N’ Roses on the way to school in the mornings. Salazar said the song is now the only thing bringing him peace.

Maite Rodriguez, 10

Maite Rodriguez had a beautiful smile and was kind to others, her cousin wrote on Facebook.

“She was her mommy’s only girl. She was her mom’s best friend. She was the light of her life!” Aiko Coronado wrote. “She was beyond smart. Her dream was to attend Texas A&M University to become a marine biologist.”

Maite was among those slain Tuesday at Robb Elementary, according to the Facebook post and a family friend.

The family friend confirmed to The Post that Maite was killed but asked not to be named to protect his privacy.

Annabell Rodriguez, 10

Annabell Rodriguez was among those slain, according to a Facebook post from a relative and interviews family members gave to media outlets.

Javier Cazares, whose 9-year-old daughter Jacklyn Cazares was also killed in the shooting, said his daughter was close with Rodriguez, who was her second cousin.

“They are all gone now,” Cazares told the Associated Press.

Polly Flores, Annabell’s great-aunt, told the New York Times that the girl was outgoing and loved being the center of attention.

“She was my little diva,” Flores said.

In a Facebook post on the day of the shooting, Lidia Anthony Luna wrote that she was seeking help to find “my little sister Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez,” then added an update. “She’s no longer with us my poor sweet little girl,” she wrote.

Eliahana Cruz Torres, 10

Eliahana Cruz Torres played on a softball team and wondered if she would become an all-star.

An aunt who spoke with her recently, quoted by the CBS television affiliate KENS Channel 5, said the 10-year-old didn’t want the season to end. She was “excited,” the aunt said, about whether she would land on the all-star roster.

“What if I make it? I’m going to be so nervous,” Eliahana said, according to the aunt’s recollection.

The aunt was not named in the report.

Eliahana was one of the students killed at Robb Elementary, her grandfather Adolfo Cruz confirmed to ABC News.

Rob Trevino, an older cousin of Eliahana, also confirmed her death in a text to The Post and said: “We’re still in shock and trying to wrap our heads around this.”

Rojelio Torres, 10

Rojelio Torres, a round-faced 10-year-old, was killed in the attack at Robb Elementary.

Eva Dulia Orta, his mother, told ABC News that Rojelio was a “very smart and loving child.”

Losing him, she added, felt like losing “a piece of my heart.”

On her Facebook page, Orta posted a picture of her son, smiling and wearing a blue polo shirt. She wrote: “R.I.P. to my son Rojelio Torres we love you and miss you.”

Alithia Ramirez, 10

Alithia Ramirez looked happy to proclaim that she was no longer 9. A photograph circulating on social media shows her with a broad smile, wearing a multicolored T-shirt that declared “Peace out single digits #I’m 10.”

A friend of the Ramirez family, Fernanda Seden, told a CBS News affiliate in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that Alithia was “very kind, very caring, loved art.”

She also loved to play soccer. On Tuesday, according to CBS and ABC News, Alithia was one of the students slain at Robb Elementary.

She was a very talented little girl,” Alithia’s grandmother Rosa Maria Ramirez told ABC. “She loved to draw. She was real sweet. Never getting into trouble.”

Uziyah Garcia, 10

Uziyah Garcia was getting ready for long days of football, swimming, video games and whatever other fun the summer might offer after he finished fourth grade.

“He was the sweetest, the kindest child,” his aunt Leticia Garcia, of Grand Prairie, Tex., said in a telephone interview. “Very polite. Loved Jesus. He loved, absolutely loved, his parents.”

The 10-year-old was among those slain Tuesday at Robb Elementary, Garcia said. He had two sisters, Garcia said, ages 15 and 7.

A grandfather, Manny Renfro, told the Associated Press that Uziyah had last visited him in San Angelo, Tex., during spring break, and he taught his grandson football pass patterns. Renfro said Uziyah was the “sweetest little boy that I’ve ever known.”

“I’m not just saying that because he was my grandkid,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Brazil outrage: police asphyxiate man in car
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/brazil-mentally-ill-black-man-dies-gas-police-car
GIST	<p>Brazilians have responded with outrage to the death of a mentally ill Black man who was bundled into the back of a police car by officers who then released a gas grenade inside the vehicle.</p> <p>Genivaldo de Jesus Santos, 38, was stopped by the federal highway police in the city of Umbaúba on Wednesday. Video footage of the incident shows two officers in helmets holding the car boot closed on his thrashing legs, as clouds of gas billow out of the vehicle.</p> <p>“They’re going to kill the guy,” an onlooker can be heard saying, as Santos’s legs go still.</p> <p>An autopsy report confirmed on Thursday that Santos had died of asphyxiation. His death came two years to the day after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis by a white police officer who was later found guilty of murder.</p> <p>According to his family, Santos suffered from schizophrenia, for which he took medication.</p> <p>Santos’s nephew Alisson de Jesus, who witnessed the incident said he had warned the police that the man was unwell before they released what he described as a teargas grenade. “It was a torture session,” he told the local press.</p> <p>The horrific death has produced shock in Brazil, where lethal police violence is commonplace and disproportionately affects the country’s Black population. According to the Brazilian Forum of Public Security, police killed 6,416 people in Brazil in 2020. Almost 80% of the victims were Black.</p> <p>“Police officers turned a car into a gas chamber and executed a mentally ill man,” Renata Souza, a Black activist and politician from Rio de Janeiro, wrote on Twitter. “There are no words in the face of such inhumanity. Brazil is an extermination camp!”</p> <p>In a statement, federal highway police in the state of Sergipe said that the officers had used “immobilisation techniques” and “instruments of minor offensive potential” after Santos became aggressive. The statement says that Santos was taken to hospital after he became unwell on the way to the police station.</p> <p>His family said Santos was already dead when he arrived at the hospital.</p>

	<p>Santos was killed one day after 26 people died during a police raid in the Vila Cruzeiro favela in Rio de Janeiro, the city's second deadliest police operation on record. Police are rarely held to account in such cases, but there were widespread calls for the officers in the video to face investigation.</p> <p>"These two pieces of vermin know they are being filmed and yet they still applied a death sentence. There is no more decency or embarrassment. They tortured and executed the guy," tweeted Douglas Belchior, a member of the Coalition for Black Rights civil rights organisation.</p> <p>"How do you get on with your day [after that]? Mine will be terrible, thinking that me or one of my friends could be the next ones," he said.</p> <p>The federal police said it would investigate Santos's death.</p> <p>Santos was buried on Thursday morning. Locals in Umbaúba staged a protest before his funeral, setting tyres on fire on the road where he was killed and demanding justice, news site G1 reported.</p> <p>"This was a crime. They acted with cruelty to kill him," Santos's widow, Maria Fabiana dos Santos, told reporters.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Stupefying tally of American gun violence
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/us/american-gun-violence.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=US%20News
GIST	<p>The repetition of horror numbs the mind: Only 11 days ago there was Buffalo, with a man driven by racism gunning down 10 people at a supermarket. The next day another angry man walked into a Presbyterian church in Laguna Woods, Calif., and killed one person and wounded five others. And now, Uvalde, Texas — a repeat of what was once thought unfathomable: the killing of at least 19 elementary school children in second, third and fourth grades.</p> <p>"I guess it's something in society we know will happen again, over and over," said Neil Heslin, whose 6-year-old son, Jesse Lewis, died in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012.</p> <p>The misery mounts, and yet nothing changes, leaving Americans with little more to do than keep lists, mental spreadsheets of death that treat events like Uvalde as just another morbid tally with superlatives like "second-deadliest shooting in an elementary school."</p> <p>Each event evokes some atrocity from the past, the exact details of each shooting growing more indistinct by the year: The latest death toll of 21 at Robb Elementary School in Texas surpasses the shooting in Parkland, Fla., in 2018, when 17 people were killed. It falls short of the deadliest school shooting — 26 people killed at Sandy Hook in Newtown, Conn.</p> <p>These are the mathematics of American gun massacres.</p> <p>All three school shootings — Newtown, Parkland and now Uvalde — have eclipsed Columbine in 1999, when such events still had the power to shock the nation.</p> <p>The reasons for the violence are familiar and incontrovertible. The United States has many more guns than citizens, about 400 million firearms, according to a 2018 survey conducted by the nonpartisan Small Arms Survey, and 331 million people.</p> <p>For more than a decade now, semiautomatic handguns, bought for personal protection, outsell rifles, which have been typically used in hunting.</p>

And the coronavirus pandemic stirred an even greater gun-buying craze. Annual domestic gun production increased from 3.9 million in 2000 to 11.3 million in 2020, according to a report released this month by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. A vast majority of those firearms stayed in the United States.

The toll of the violence, [especially on children](#), has only grown. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the rate of gun deaths of children 14 and younger rose by roughly 50 percent from the end of 2019 to the end of 2020.

Last year, more than 1,500 children and teenagers younger than 18 were killed in homicides and accidental shootings, compared with about 1,380 in 2020, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a database tracking gun deaths.

“Why are we willing to live with this carnage?” President Biden said on Tuesday night after returning from a trip to Asia. “Why do we keep letting this happen?”

Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut, a young legislator when the children were killed in Sandy Hook, exhorted his fellow senators to action on Tuesday. “What are we doing? What are we doing?” he said on the Senate floor.

These were questions with familiar answers: not much of anything on the federal level. Republicans, often appealing to the Second Amendment, have blocked efforts to add stiffer background checks for gun purchasers every time another major mass shooting jostles the nation’s conscience. Still, within hours of the shooting in Uvalde, Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the majority leader, moved to [clear the way to force votes](#) in the coming days on legislation that would strengthen background checks.

The Uvalde gunman, who the Texas governor said had no known mental health problems, bought two semiautomatic rifles within the past week, shortly after turning 18, a state police official said. He was killed by law enforcement at the scene.

States like Texas have forged ahead with some of the least-restrictive gun laws in the United States, priding itself as a state with responsible gun owners — more than a million — even with its recent history of mass shootings.

Gov. Greg Abbott signed a wide-ranging law in 2021 that [ended the requirement for Texans to obtain a license to carry handguns](#), allowing virtually anyone over the age of 21 to carry one. The landmark law made the state one of the largest to adopt a “constitutional carry” law that basically eliminates most restrictions on the ability to carry handguns.

Mr. Abbott described it as “the strongest Second Amendment legislation in Texas history.”

[Mass shootings have become so common](#) in the United States that only a small fraction rise to attract widespread attention beyond the communities directly affected. On the same weekend as the Buffalo killings, [more than a dozen people were wounded by gunfire](#) in downtown Milwaukee, near the arena where an N.B.A. playoff game ended hours earlier, the authorities said.

Two weeks earlier, the owner and two employees of the Broadway Inn Express motel in Biloxi, Miss., were fatally shot, and another person was also shot dead during a carjacking.

Less than four weeks before that, a barrage of gunfire in Sacramento [killed six people and wounded 12](#) in a shooting that the authorities said involved at least five gunmen.

On Monday, the F.B.I. released data showing a rapidly escalating pattern of public shootings in the United States.

The bureau identified 61 “active shooter” attacks in 2021 that killed 103 people and injured 130 others.

	<p>That was the highest annual total since 2017, when 143 people were killed, and hundreds more were wounded, numbers inflated by the sniper attack on the Las Vegas Strip.</p> <p>The 2021 total represented a 52 percent increase from the tally of such shootings in 2020, and a 97 percent increase from 2017, according to the F.B.I.'s Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021 report.</p> <p>In Uvalde, Rey Chapa has a nephew who was at the school during the shooting but was not injured.</p> <p>"This is just evil," Mr. Chapa said in an interview, using an expletive. He was waiting to hear back from family and friends about the conditions of other children and scrolling through Facebook for updates. "I'm afraid I'm going to know a lot of these kids that were killed."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 NY busts luxury goods shoplifting ring
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/nyregion/nyc-shoplifting-ring.html
GIST	<p>For years, the leader of a New York City theft ring would draw up wish lists for dozens of underlings whom he sent out to shoplift millions of dollars worth of beauty products and luxury goods that he could quickly sell online, prosecutors said Thursday.</p> <p>The leader, Roni Rubinov, 42, has been charged with enterprise corruption, money laundering and other crimes, the New York State attorney general's office said Thursday. Prosecutors said he had a keen sense of his market: He ordered subordinates to target stores such as Neiman Marcus, CVS, Sephora and Bloomingdale's, where his employees would filch eye creams, hair serums and products by companies like Revlon, Burt's Bees and Vichy.</p> <p>They stole designer goods, too, officials said, including a gold Jimmy Choo handbag and clothes by Gucci and Oscar de la Renta, and would then bring the wares to one of Mr. Rubinov's Midtown Manhattan pawnshops. There, others working for the ringleader would purchase the stolen items for a fraction of their retail value, before the goods were eventually resold on eBay.</p> <p>"Mr. Rubinov, himself, preys on the weak," Nicholas Fiore, the deputy inspector of the New York City Police Department's central robbery division, said at a news conference Thursday. Mr. Rubinov often employed people who had a long history of drug use and of committing petty crimes, he said.</p> <p>Perhaps the most egregious crime Mr. Rubinov is accused of committing, Attorney General Letitia James said at the news conference, is buying food stamps at a discount from subordinates and using them to buy groceries for himself.</p> <p>Mr. Rubinov, of Fresh Meadows, Queens, was one of 41 people indicted in connection with the theft ring, officials said on Thursday. All told, more than \$3.8 million worth of stolen retail items were seized by the police and the attorney general's office. They also recovered more than 550 stolen gift and cash cards, and more than \$300,000 in bills.</p> <p>The arrests came as the city continues to grapple with how to boost an economy disrupted by the pandemic. Major retailers have closed locations across Manhattan as remote work changes patterns of traffic and commerce. Small businesses have scant financial resources to wait out the change.</p> <p>Many businesses in the city "right now are hanging on by a thread," Mayor Eric Adams said at the news conference. "Some would look at this and say, 'What's the big impact?' It has a huge impact on our economy. It erodes trust. It sends a signal that we are in a city out of control."</p> <p>He added: "This is not a city where you can walk into a store, take what you want and walk out."</p> <p>Organized groups nationwide have increasingly stolen large amounts of goods from retailers to resell online, and Mr. Rubinov and his managers started recruiting people to steal highly profitable merchandise in 2017. Nearly every day of the week, workers would take the stolen goods to New</p>

	<p>Liberty Loans Pawn Shop or Romanov Gold Buyers Inc., both on West 47th Street and both owned by Mr. Rubinov, prosecutors said.</p> <p>Those working at the brick-and-mortar stores would pay cash for the stolen property, officials said. After these transactions, the merchandise was taken to Mr. Rubinov's home or to a so-called stash house in Queens, where stolen goods were kept. Other employees would then post the property for resale on an eBay store.</p> <p>In 2019, Rubinov signed a lease for a large warehouse space in Fresh Meadows, where he planned to open a department store-like facility to keep his stockpile.</p> <p>Mr. Rubinov could not be reached for comment on Thursday. It was unclear whether he had a lawyer.</p> <p>The indictment was unsealed Thursday before Justice Juan M. Merchan of State Supreme Court in Manhattan. Most of the defendants face as long as 25 years in prison if convicted.</p> <p>Ms. James said her office and the police are also looking into similar shoplifting schemes "to send a message out there that the mayor reiterated that this will not be tolerated in the City of New York."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Criticism over police response mounts
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/26/us/texas-elementary-school-shooting#a-texas-town-grieves-its-lost-children-as-details-of-the-gunmans-rampage-emerge
GIST	<p>UVALDE, Texas — The grief of families in Uvalde, Texas, was compounded by anger and frustration on Thursday as police leaders struggled to answer questions about the horrific hour it took to halt a gunman who opened fire on students and teachers inside Robb Elementary School.</p> <p>As parents began making funeral arrangements — on a day that was meant to mark the last of the school year — criticism deepened in the majority-Hispanic ranching community of 15,200 over the protracted police response, and the failure of officials to adequately explain their actions.</p> <p>No school police officer confronted the gunman before he went into the school, a state police spokesman said on Thursday, contradicting earlier reports of an encounter outside, and suggesting a shortfall in the response.</p> <p>"He walked in unobstructed initially," Victor Escalon, a regional director for the state's Department of Public Safety, said at a news conference. "He was not confronted by anybody."</p> <p>Parents had massed outside the school on Tuesday as gunfire erupted inside, urging the police who were holding them at bay to go in and stop the carnage. On Thursday, focus shifted for some lawmakers in Texas and in Washington from debates over the weapon the 18-year-old gunman had used, an AR-15-style rifle, to questions about the hourlong delay in bringing the rampage to an end. Most mass shootings are over within minutes, policing experts said.</p> <p>"I'm calling on the F.B.I. to use their maximum authority to investigate and provide a full report," said Representative Joaquin Castro, a Democrat from San Antonio.</p> <p>Chief Daniel Rodriguez of the Uvalde Police Department and the head of the school district police, Chief Pete Arredondo, did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The first report of a gunman approaching the school came around 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday. Moments before, the gunman, identified as Salvador Ramos, 18, had crashed a pickup truck in a ditch by the school after having shot his 66-year-old grandmother in the face in her home, just a few streets from the school.</p>

Albert Vargas, 62, an electrician, was at work in a house near Robb Elementary School and said he saw the crash.

"I ran down there thinking someone got hurt," he said. Then he saw that the driver was carrying a rifle. "His look matched the black clothes he was wearing," Mr. Vargas said. He fired briefly at a nearby funeral home, he said. "And then he turns to me and popped two more rounds at close range, but misses, as well," Mr. Vargas recalled.

"His face was blank. There was no expression there," he said. "He looked like nothing mattered but the mission he was on. He fired the shots, ran, jumped a fence and headed towards the school."

An armed Uvalde school district officer, who had been nearby, responded to reports that a driver involved in a crash had exited his vehicle with a gun. The officer could not see anyone when he arrived, according to a state police official, but then heard gunshots as the gunman began firing at the windows and entered the building. The officer did not open fire.

Investigators were still trying to piece together the gunman's movements during the time he was outside, before he entered the building. He went through an unlocked door at 11:40 a.m., Mr. Escalon said, and began shooting inside. Police officers, including the school district officer, went into the school minutes later.

By the time officers reported that the gunman had been killed around 1 p.m., he had shot dead 19 students and two teachers, all of them apparently locked with the gunman in connected classrooms.

During that terrifying time — well over an hour — parents of students who were trapped in the school gathered outside the building as word spread of the shooting. Some were physically restrained by the police in a scene that witnesses described as disorder bordering on mayhem. The crowd grew to hundreds.

"Parents were crying and some were fighting verbally with the police and screaming that they wanted their children," Marcela Cabrales, a pastor, said.

Miguel Palacios, a small-business owner, said frantic parents were so upset that at one point they tried to take down the school's chain-link fence. "The parents were on one side of the fence, the Border Patrol and police were on the other side of the fence, and they were trying to tear it open," he said.

Some of the parents implored the heavily armed police officers at the chaotic scene to storm the school. Others, including those who were off-duty members of law enforcement, went inside themselves to try to find their own children.

"There were plenty of men out there armed to the teeth that could have gone in faster," said Javier Cazares, 43, who arrived at the school on Tuesday as the attack was taking place. He said he could hear gunfire; his daughter, Jacklyn, was inside.

"They said they rushed in and all that," he said. "We didn't see that."

Jacklyn died in the shooting, along with her cousin. Mr. Cazares said he believed that a faster police response would have made a difference. "More kids would have been saved, in my opinion," he said.

Chief Rodriguez said in a statement on Thursday that officers from his department went into the school "within minutes" after the shooting began, and that more than one of them had been shot by the gunman. The state police official, who requested anonymity to describe the evolving timeline of events, said two Uvalde officers were shot as they initially tried to enter the classroom at about 11:45 a.m.

At that point, officials said, the officers fell back and began calling for help. "We have officers calling for additional resources," Mr. Escalon said. "Tactical teams. We need equipment. We need specialty equipment. We need body armor. We need precision riflemen, negotiators."

As the officers fell, the gunman continued shooting, said the state police official. It was during the early minutes, police officials said, that most of the victims inside the room — a pair of what officials said were connected classrooms — were shot.

But it remained unclear how many of the children or teachers who died could have been saved if the gunman had been killed sooner.

And questions remained about the decision by the police at the scene to await the arrival of specially trained officers from the Border Patrol to finally storm through the classroom door roughly an hour after officers had first pulled back. Police officials have said that with the gunman isolated in a classroom, the officers on scene focused on evacuating students and staff members from other classrooms in order to prevent additional fatalities.

The gunman was reported over the police radio to have been fatally shot by members of the tactical team at about 1 p.m.

While the Uvalde Police Department has in the past boasted of its SWAT team, those officers did not appear to be involved in trying to stop the gunman.

The investigation into Tuesday's shooting and the police response was being led by the Texas Rangers, a division of the Department of Public Safety. The F.B.I. was helping to collect and analyze surveillance video to better understand what took place, according to a law enforcement official.

Law enforcement training for active shooters has evolved considerably since the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, when the emphasis was on securing a perimeter and waiting for a tactical team before moving in.

Officers are now trained to disable an active shooter as quickly as possible, before rescuing victims and without waiting for a tactical team or special equipment to arrive. That is true even if only two officers are available — or one who is willing to go in alone — said Brian Higgins, a former SWAT team commander and police chief who now teaches at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and runs a safety consulting firm.

Mr. Higgins emphasized that much of what occurred in the Uvalde shooting remained unclear. "If by the police going in, more people would have been injured, they're in this Catch-22," Mr. Higgins said. "You don't want anybody else shot."

As parents looked on, police officers could be seen helping evacuate children who were still inside.

"When they started breaking windows to get kids out, I knew he was still in there alive, in there and shooting," said Victor Luna, 40, who has a 9-year-old son at the school. "It's common sense: If they had shot him down, the kids could have come out through the door."

He feels police officers should have been willing to sacrifice their own lives to save children. "That's what they signed up for," he said.

Law enforcement officers described a chaotic scene and a large number of children who had to be evacuated.

Jacob Albarado, an off-duty Border Patrol officer, was about to sit down for a haircut when he got a text message from his wife Trisha, a fourth-grade teacher at Robb Elementary.

"There's an active shooter," she said in the message. "Help," and then: "I love you."

	<p>Mr. Albarado flew out of the barbershop and sped to the school. His wife and the children she taught were hiding under desks and behind curtains. Their daughter, a second grader at Robb, was locked in a bathroom, she had told him. He borrowed a shotgun from the barber, who had come with him.</p> <p>Once he got to the school, he learned that a tactical team was already forming to enter the wing where the gunman was holed up.</p> <p>So Mr. Albarado quickly made a plan with other officers at the scene: evacuate as many children as possible. "I'm looking for my daughter, but I also know what wing she's in," he said, "so I start clearing all the classes in her wing."</p> <p>Two officers provided cover, guns drawn, he said, and two others guided the children out on the sidewalk. "They were just all hysterical, of course," he said. When he finally saw his 8-year-old daughter, Jayda, he said, he hugged her, but then kept moving the other children along.</p> <p>Still barricaded inside a room elsewhere in the school, the gunman fired sporadically at the walls and door, officials said, until the tactical team went into the room and killed him.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Man pleads guilty Seattle hate crime arson
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/man-pleads-guilty-to-2020-hate-crime-arson-at-seattle-queer-nightclub
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - A Sedro-Woolley man pleaded guilty to a hate crime in the 2020 arson at Queer/Bar in Seattle.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney's Office says 25-year-old Kalvinn Garcia pleaded guilty Thursday to committing a hate crime, connected to the arson at the LGBTQ-friendly nightclub on Feb. 24, 2020.</p> <p>"The defendant targeted the patrons inside Queer/Bar, a known safe space for the LGBTQI+ community," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke. "Hate crimes have no place in our society today, and we stand ready to use our federal civil rights laws to hold perpetrators accountable. All people deserve to feel safe and secure living in their communities, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity."</p> <p>According to court documents, Garcia was arrested minutes after he was suspected of setting the fire at Queer/Bar. He reportedly told officers he targeted the club because it angered him to see the word "queer." The Attorney's Office said Garcia told officers, "I think it's wrong that we have a bunch of queers in our society."</p> <p>A few weeks later, Garcia reportedly told a stranger he intended to trap people inside the club and hurt them by setting the fire.</p> <p>"Mr. Garcia endangered countless people who he did not know, and who were simply trying to live their lives, solely because of his own hatred," said U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. "We must stand up to this hate at every opportunity, to demonstrate to our community that acting on hate will not be tolerated."</p> <p>The Attorney's Office said Garcia faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.</p> <p>Garcia is scheduled to be sentenced Sep. 20, 2022.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Police: fatal shooting Spanaway store
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/suspect-sought-after-woman-fatally-shot-at-spanaway-7-eleven-convenience-store-pierce-county-crime-gun-violence
GIST	<p>SPANAWAY, Wash. — The Pierce County Sheriff's Office was searching Thursday for a suspect who shot and killed a woman outside a Spanaway convenience store and who was apparently an innocent bystander, authorities said.</p>

	<p>The victim, whose identity was pending, was rushed for treatment to a local hospital, where she died, according to sheriff's Sgt. Darren Moss.</p> <p>According to investigators, investigators were called to a 7-Eleven store located at 17410 Pacific Ave S. shortly after 9 p.m. for a report of gunfire.</p> <p>First responders found the woman at the scene.</p> <p>Investigators have not confirmed reports of how the woman was shot, saying only that she was wounded but was not directly involved in the situation that led to the gunfire.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Police: shooting in SODO injures 1
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-investigating-shooting-after-1-wounded-in-sodo
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle police were investigating after a 23-year-old man was shot and wounded Thursday night in the SODO district, authorities said.</p> <p>The victim, who was not immediately identified, was rushed for treatment to Harborview Medical Center, where he was listed in critical condition Thursday night, according to investigators.</p> <p>Investigators were called to 8th Ave. S. and S. Massachusetts Street around 11:15 p.m. for a report of gunfire. When they arrived, they found a victim suffering from a gunshot wound.</p> <p>It was not immediately clear what prompted the gunfire or if the victim knew the person who shot them.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Arrest: Uber human smuggling scheme
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/man-charged-uber-human-smuggling-scheme/A66XUA6BQVHLZEXNE5CVSRM4IE/
GIST	<p>A California man was arrested Tuesday in Lacey and charged by criminal complaint with running a human smuggling scheme into Washington state and over the northern border with Canada, U.S. Attorney Nick Brown announced Thursday.</p> <p>According to the criminal complaint, 48-year-old Rajinder Pal Singh, also known as Jaspal Gill, and his co-conspirators used Uber to transport people who had illegally crossed the border into the Seattle area.</p> <p>Records show how Uber trips that began near the Canadian border in the early hours of the morning would be split between two rides. For example, one trip would go from the border to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, and then minutes later a second trip would go from a nearby airport hotel to an address in Lacey owned by Singh's wife.</p> <p>According to documents, the Lacey house served as a way station for those entering the U.S. illegally.</p> <p>In some cases, Singh arranged for rental cars to drive those who illegally entered the country to destinations in the Midwest. More recently, Singh had purchased airline tickets for his customers to be flown to their destinations.</p> <p>The smuggling scheme had been underway since at least 2018 but slowed during the pandemic when Canada was not admitting noncitizens into the country.</p> <p>In total, the investigation estimates that between July 2018 and April 2022, the 17 Uber accounts connected to the scheme ran up more than \$75,000 in charges.</p> <p>All 17 accounts were loaded onto prepaid phones in an effort to further hide who was behind them.</p>

	<p>According to the criminal complaint, Singh charged up to \$11,500 per person for his part in the smuggling services. Singh was also captured on surveillance video buying large numbers of Uber gift cards in northern California.</p> <p>Some of those gift cards were used in connection with Uber trips that started near the Canadian border.</p> <p>“We are grateful for the effort and dedication of Homeland Security investigators who handled this case,” an Uber spokesperson said in a statement. “Human trafficking is a global issue and Uber is thankful we could do our part to support the law enforcement investigation and provide information that helped lead to an arrest and potentially saved the lives of countless victims.”</p> <p>Conspiracy to transport and harbor illegal aliens is punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Concerns: chop shops in South Sound
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/concerns-growing-over-two-alleged-chop-shops-south-sound/4H5K4HBUHJA2DKWWEMJWOEFOHU/
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — Law enforcement and Tacoma City councilmembers have expressed concern over two alleged chop shops in the area.</p> <p>Sgt. Darren Moss, with the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department, says you know a chop shop when you see it: cars stripped down, no license plates, new vehicles coming in and out.</p> <p>“They’re tearing things apart, they’re scrapping for metal,” said Moss. “They’re putting cars together that look like Frankenstein with all these parts and things.”</p> <p>According to Moss, what’s happening at the corner of Pacific Avenue and South Division Lane in Tacoma is just that.</p> <p>“It’s not really an organized thing, its just becoming a dumping ground,” said Moss.</p> <p>The Sheriff’s Department has been called to the location before, but because the land is owned by the city, they can’t investigate. The city would have to do that.</p> <p>Moss tells us he is not aware of an alleged chop shop beneath the iconic 11th Street Bridge, but Tacoma City Councilmember Conor McCarthy certainly is. Back in late April, McCarthy mentioned it during a council “Homeless Update.”</p> <p>“What do you do for the chop shop, the RV chop shop under the 11th Street Bridge?,” said McCarthy. “We have services, we can help, we’re not interested.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 CBP seize 1,400lbs meth aboard small boat
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/feds-stop-boat-meth-san-juan-islands/281-4fb46a1a-0eff-4fee-8e52-6cee5d0783d6
GIST	<p>SAN JUAN COUNTY, Wash. — U.S. authorities reported that they stopped a small boat carrying a large shipment of methamphetamine after they saw it riding low in the water in the San Juan Islands.</p> <p>U.S. Customs and Border Protection said officers stopped the 18-foot Bayliner speedboat on Wednesday as it was headed toward Canada.</p> <p>They reported finding 1,432 pounds of meth on board, packed in 28 duffel bags secured with luggage padlocks.</p>

	<p>The boat's occupant, identified as an Alberta, Canada resident, was arrested on a drug distribution count. He made an initial appearance in U.S. District Court in Seattle on Thursday.</p> <p>The suspect's attorney, federal public defender Vanessa Pai-Thompson, declined to comment.</p> <p>According to a federal criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court in Seattle, the suspect told investigators that he had been hiking near a marina in Sidney, on Vancouver Island when someone approached him and offered him \$1,000 to move a boat from Sidney to Anacortes, Washington, and back.</p> <p>According to the complaint, the suspect said he left from Vancouver Island on Tuesday.</p> <p>He said four men met him at a Washington State Parks boat dock, took the boat on a trailer and dropped him off at an inn.</p> <p>The next day, they brought him back to the dock and he left in the newly loaded boat to return to Canada. He said he did not know what was in the duffel bags, the complaint said.</p> <p>The suspect faces charges of possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute. Due to the amount of drugs, he faces a mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Official accounts on shooting change
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/26/uvalde-shooting-official-accounts/
GIST	<p>Since a gunman opened fire at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Tex., on Tuesday, killing 19 children and two teachers, authorities have provided an incomplete — and evolving — explanation of what happened.</p> <p>Officials, who are facing mounting questions about the police response to the massacre, have offered varied timelines and explanations of the massacre and law enforcement's response. They have also made sometimes inconsistent or contradictory announcements about key details, such as how the shooter entered the school or how long he was inside. They have even withdrawn some claims outright.</p> <p>While it is common for details to shift following mass attacks, some of the changes in Uvalde made during news briefings and interviews have been striking. Here is a brief rundown of some ways the official accounts have differed:</p> <p>Did anyone try to stop the gunman from entering the school?</p> <p>Authorities had initially said the attacker exchanged gunfire with a school police officer on Tuesday before entering the school.</p> <p>Travis Considine, chief of communications with the Texas Department of Public Safety, said in an interview with The Washington Post on Wednesday that after crashing his vehicle into a railing near Robb Elementary, the gunman encountered a school police officer and “they exchange gunfire.” The gunman, Considine said, “shoots the officer, wounds him, goes into the school.”</p> <p>Also on Wednesday, Lt. Christopher Olivarez, another DPS spokesman, said in a separate interview with The Post that the attacker and the school police officer exchanged gunfire. The officer was shot and injured, Olivarez said.</p> <p>During a briefing later Wednesday, Steven C. McCraw, director of DPS, said a school police officer “engaged” the shooter but that no shots were exchanged. Officials have noted that the investigation is ongoing, and McCraw described the information as preliminary.</p> <p>Speaking on Thursday, Victor Escalon Jr., a regional director with DPS, offered a significant change to the official account, saying that there was no school resource officer who confronted the shooter at all. In short, he admitted, none of that happened.</p>

“It was reported that a school district police officer confronted the suspect that was making entry,” Escalon said of the information his agency had released. “Not accurate. He walked in unobstructed.”

A lengthy gap between the attacker arriving and going inside

Authorities had previously seemed to suggest that little time elapsed between the gunman crashing his vehicle near the school and heading inside.

Officials say the gunman shot his grandmother in the face — prompting her to contact police — before driving to the school. Speaking at the Wednesday briefing, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) said that after shooting his grandmother, “the gunman fled, and as he was fleeing, had an accident just outside of the elementary school, and he ran into the school.”

McCraw, at the same briefing, said the gunman crashed the vehicle, got out and approached the school, where he said the school resource officer “engaged” the attacker. The gunman was still “able to make it into the school,” he said.

But on Thursday, Escalon said there was actually a considerable gap officials had not previously disclosed. After crashing his vehicle, the gunman instead remained outside for 12 minutes, firing his gun at nearby people and the school.

Escalon said police only arrived after the gunman had gone inside, adding that the door appeared to be unlocked.

Barricaded vs. pinned down

In his account Wednesday, McCraw said that police officers began to “engage” the attacker while he was inside the classroom. McCraw said law enforcement “continued to keep him pinned down in that location” until a tactical team could be put together to breach the classroom.

Also on Wednesday, Olivarez, the DPS spokesman, [told CNN](#) that officers responding to the gunman once he was inside “were at a disadvantage because the gunman was able to make entry into a classroom, barricade himself inside that classroom,” suggesting that instead of keeping him pinned in one place intentionally, authorities were unable to get to him.

Speaking on Thursday, Escalon also said the gunman was inside for about an hour before law enforcement officials confronted him.

Body armor vs. no body armor

Officials had initially said the gunman was wearing body armor, before reversing course and saying this was not the case.

Sgt. Erick Estrada, another spokesman for DPS, described the gunman as having “a rifle and body armor on.” Later, Olivarez said the gunman was not wearing body armor, but instead a vest to store extra magazines, though it did not contain any protective armored plates.

Making entry or not making entry

Escalon also contradicted himself during Thursday’s news briefing. While he said initially that the officers were “inside making entry” but had to take cover while the gunman shot at them, he later made it sound like they did not make it inside, saying: “They don’t make entry initially because of the gunfire.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Police face shooting response questions
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/uvalde-school-shooting-politics-texas-shootings-56a4d01fb1cda19947db89fcb6bd85fd

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Law enforcement authorities faced mounting questions and criticism Thursday over how much time elapsed before they stormed a Texas elementary school classroom and put a stop to the rampage by a gunman who killed 19 children and two teachers.

Separately, after two days of unclear and contradictory accounts from police, a Texas law enforcement official said that an armed school district officer did not encounter or exchange fire with the attacker, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, before he entered Robb Elementary in the town of Uvalde, as previously reported.

But many other details about the timing of events and the police response remained murky. The motive for the massacre — the nation's deadliest school shooting since Newtown, Connecticut, a decade ago — remained under investigation, with authorities saying Ramos had no known criminal or mental health history.

During the siege, which ended when a U.S. Border Patrol team burst in and shot the gunman to death, frustrated onlookers urged police officers to charge into the school, according to witnesses.

"Go in there! Go in there!" women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, said Juan Carranza, 24, who watched the scene from outside a house across the street.

Carranza said the officers should have entered the school sooner: "There were more of them. There was just one of him."

Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw said Wednesday that 40 minutes to an hour elapsed from when Ramos opened fire on the school security officer to when the tactical team shot him.

"The bottom line is law enforcement was there," McCraw said. "They did engage immediately. They did contain (Ramos) in the classroom."

But a department spokesman said Thursday that authorities were still working to clarify the timeline of the attack, uncertain whether that period of 40 minutes to an hour began when the gunman reached the school, or earlier, when he shot his grandmother at home.

"Right now we do not have an accurate or confident timeline to provide to say the gunman was in the school for this period," Lt. Christopher Olivarez told CNN.

Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz did not give a timeline but said repeatedly that the tactical officers from his agency who arrived at the school did not hesitate. He said they moved rapidly to enter the building, lining up in a "stack" behind an agent holding up a shield.

"What we wanted to make sure is to act quickly, act swiftly, and that's exactly what those agents did," Ortiz told Fox News.

But a law enforcement official said that once in the building, the Border Patrol agents had trouble breaching the classroom door and had to get a staff member to open the room with a key. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk publicly about the investigation.

Olivarez said investigators were trying to establish whether the classroom was, in fact, locked or barricaded in some way.

Javier Cazares, whose fourth grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, said he raced to the school as the massacre unfolded. When he arrived, he saw two officers outside the school and about five others escorting students out of the building. But 15 or 20 minutes passed before the arrival of officers with shields, equipped to confront the gunman, he said.

As more parents flocked to the school, he and others pressed police to act, Cazares said. He heard about four gunshots before he and the others were ordered back to a parking lot.

“A lot of us were arguing with the police, ‘You all need to go in there. You all need to do your jobs.’ Their response was, ‘We can’t do our jobs because you guys are interfering,’” Cazares said.

Ramos crashed his truck into a ditch outside the school, grabbed his AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle and shot at two people outside a funeral home, who ran away uninjured, according to authorities and witnesses.

As for the armed school officer, he was driving nearby but was not on campus when Ramos crashed his truck, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss the case and spoke of condition of anonymity. Investigators have concluded that school officer was not positioned between the school and Ramos, leaving him unable to confront the shooter before he entered the building, the law enforcement official said.

As Ramos entered the school, two Uvalde police officers exchanged fire with him, and were wounded, according to Olivarez. Ramos began killing his victims in a classroom.

On Wednesday night, hundreds packed the bleachers at the town’s fairgrounds for a vigil. Some cried. Some closed their eyes tight, mouthing silent prayers. Parents wrapped their arms around their children as the speakers led prayers for healing.

Before attacking the school, Ramos shot and wounded his grandmother at the home they shared. Gilbert Gallegos, 82, who lives across the street and has known the family for decades, said he was puttering in his yard when he heard the shots.

Ramos ran out the front door and across the yard to a truck parked in front of the house and raced away: “He spun out, I mean fast,” spraying gravel in the air, Gallegos said.

Ramos’ grandmother emerged covered in blood: “She says, ‘Berto, this is what he did. He shot me.’” She was hospitalized.

Gallegos said he had heard no arguments before or after the shots, and knew of no history of bullying or abuse of Ramos, whom he rarely saw.

Lorena Auguste was substitute teaching at Uvalde High School when she heard about the shooting and began frantically texting her niece, a fourth grader at Robb Elementary. Eventually she found out the girl was OK.

But that night, her niece had a question.

“Why did they do this to us?” the girl asked. “We’re good kids. We didn’t do anything wrong.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/27 Texas officer defends police (in)action
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/uvalde-police-school-shooting-texas-enter-building-robb-elementary-school-response-time-1710727?utm_source=PushnamiMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=automatic&UTM=1653653786035&subscriberId=614e18b67aeb51cecbe2d56a
GIST	<p>A Texas lieutenant has defended the actions of the police officers who responded to the massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.</p> <p>Twenty-one people—19 children and two teachers—were killed in Tuesday's mass shooting. The gunman was later identified as Salvador Ramos, 18.</p>

Lieutenant Chris Olivarez, from the Texas Department of Public Safety, was asked by [CNN](#)'s Wolf Blitzer why the officers did not storm the school as soon as they arrived.

Blitzer said: "Officers were on the scene within minutes of this gunman entering that elementary school, but it was another hour or so before the gunman was neutralized."

"Can you walk us through what exactly law enforcement was doing for 60 minutes or so while the shooter remained in that classroom killing those kids and teachers?"

The Wall Street Journal has reported that the gunman fired shots outside the school for 12 minutes before he walked in, citing a timeline set out by Victor Escalon, a regional director for the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Police arrived four minutes after the shooter entered the school, according to Escalon's timeline, "and exchanged gunfire with Ramos, who locked himself in a fourth-grade classroom."

Olivarez told Blitzer that the law enforcement agencies involved wanted to clarify the narrative on the shooting and pointed out that conflicting statements and reports have been circulating.

"We want to provide factual information by corroborating that information through physical evidence. This is still early stages in the investigation—that is one thing we need to understand," Olivarez said.

"One thing I want to stress is that officers were in that building within minutes. They maintained their presence inside that school.

"We had multiple officers that responded on the scene within minutes. Two of those officers were shot, they took cover because you have to understand this is an active situation.

"We have an active shooter that is shooting towards law enforcement as well as the children, the students, the teachers that are inside that school.

"Those officers maintained cover, they did not flee from that school ... while they were being shot at."

He added that more officers arrived and began evacuating other children and teachers. The school was full, Olivarez said, and the authorities were trying to evacuate as many people as possible.

Blitzer asked whether it would have been better for the officers who arrived first to focus on eliminating the active shooter as quickly as possible.

Olivarez said: "What the American people need to understand is that officers are making entry into this building. They do not know where this gunman is.

"They are hearing gunshots, they are receiving gunshots. At that point, if they proceeded further without knowing where this suspect was at, they could have been shot, they could have been killed.

"At that point, that gunman would have had an opportunity to kill other people inside that school.

"So, they were able to contain that gunman inside that classroom so that he was not able to go to any other portions of the school to commit any other killings."

In the wake of the shooting, members of the public [have expressed their frustration](#) at the Uvalde Police Department on social media.

"Why did it take over 1h to go in? How many lives could have been saved," wrote a Wilmington resident on the department's [Facebook](#) page.

	<p>The same question is being asked repeatedly on social media, particularly after footage was released that shows police officers restraining panicked parents outside the school rather than rushing in to rescue the children.</p> <p><i>Newsweek</i> has contacted the Uvalde Police Department for comment.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Arrests; Texas copycat school threats
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/texas-police-arrest-four-threats-school-donna
GIST	<p>The Donna Police Department in Texas on Thursday arrested four males, including two juveniles, in connection to threats made against a Donna school, according to local reports.</p> <p>The threats came two days after 19 elementary school students and two teachers were killed in a mass school shooting in Uvalde on Tuesday, leading to threats from a handful of copycat actors across the state in the days that followed.</p> <p>The Donna PD arrested and charged Nathaniel Seth Montelongo, 17, and Barbarito Pantoja, 17, with conspiracy to commit aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, local news outlet MyRGV.com reported.</p> <p>"We stopped an act of physical violence and harm on our students," Donna PD Chief Donald Crist said.</p> <p>The students are being held on \$750,000 bond, according to the outlet.</p> <p>Police said two other minor students were arrested in connection to the incident after receiving a tip that the group was planning to carry out an attack against an unspecified Donna school.</p> <p>The Donna PD and Donna Independent School District (ISD) did not immediately respond to inquiries from FoxNews.com.</p> <p>The Donna ISD released a statement Thursday announcing that classes had been canceled amid threats to the district and in light of the tragedy in Uvalde.</p> <p>"The safety and security of our students and staff is our first priority," the announcement said. "Classes will resume Tuesday morning."</p> <p>Authorities continue to investigate Tuesday's shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde that left 21 people dead.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Gunman messages dozen before shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/accused-texas-gunman-messages-dozen-people-days-shooting/story?id=85005960
GIST	<p>In the days and weeks before one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history, the accused Robb Elementary gunman appears to have sent disturbing messages -- including claims about intentions of violence at school -- to numerous young people he met online, leaving a trail of digital red flags that appears to have gone unnoticed.</p> <p>Over a dozen people tell ABC News that the accused gunman, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, sent them concerning messages, across multiple social media platforms, in the days leading up to the massacre.</p> <p>Hours before the massacre, Ramos allegedly messaged a young girl on Instagram saying that he had a secret he wanted to tell her, according to messages reviewed by ABC News, the contents of which law enforcement sources say are part of the ongoing investigation into the shooting. Ramos had allegedly tagged the girl in a photo of two guns days earlier.</p>

In another message allegedly sent the morning of the shooting, Ramos sent a photo of a gun lying on a bed, according to a user who shared direct messages from the suspect's alleged account with ABC News. She replied, asking, "Why'd u send me a pic of a gun."

And moments before the attack, the accused gunman allegedly sent a string of messages to a young girl in Germany who he had met on the social media app Yubo, detailing that he had shot his grandmother and was heading to the school for his next target, according to messages reviewed by ABC News.

In an interview with ABC News, the young girl, who asked to be referred to as "Cece," said that since the shooting she has been asking herself, "What if I could change the outcome, what if I could change his mind to not do this?" Cece said she regretted not putting together why Ramos had "bought two rifles on his birthday, May 16, and ordered a package full with ammunitions."

Cece said that, in hindsight, there were also other warning signs -- including the fact that Ramos asked others on Yubo if they wanted to be famous.

Another user on Instagram showed ABC News alleged messages from Ramos saying his preferred weapon is the AR-15, which was the assault weapon used in the Texas shooting.

A week before the shooting, Ramos sent another Yubo user a message telling her he would make her famous if she followed him back on Instagram, according to messages reviewed by ABC News.

And another young user told ABC News that the Ramos was on Yubo the day before the massacre and that he implied that something would occur the next day.

That user, who lives in Greece and asked to remain anonymous, told ABC News she tried to report Ramos to Yubo -- but that "regardless of how many times he was reported ... he would still come back."

A spokesperson for Yubo, when asked by ABC News if Ramos' account had been flagged, said that "at this stage, we are not legally able to release any specific user information outside of direct requests from law enforcement."

The company "can confirm that we are investigating an account that has since been banned from the platform" the Yubo spokesperson said. "We are deeply saddened by this unspeakable loss and are fully cooperating with law enforcement on their investigation."

The majority of the users who Ramos allegedly messaged in the days leading up to the shooting told ABC News that they were first contacted by him on Yubo, which has been described as a dating app for teens. The users he communicated with are predominantly high-school age. Most said they did not report the messages and didn't take them seriously.

In the weeks leading up to the deadly attack, Ramos also appeared to have made efforts to meet some of the users he had met on Yubo in person, according to messages shown to ABC News.

"He was supposed to meet up with me," a young girl told ABC News before expressing relief. "I just never really texted him back."

The user showed ABC News messages allegedly showing that Ramos had planned to meet up with her in late April.

"He would mostly follow girls who he thought were attractive," another Yubo user told ABC News. "And asked to meet up with them."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Gunman's final 90min. fuel questions
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/police-face-questions-delays-storming-texas-school-84992160

UVALDE, Texas -- It was 11:28 a.m. when the Ford pickup slammed into a ditch behind the low-slung Texas school and the driver jumped out carrying an AR-15-style rifle.

Twelve minutes after that, authorities say, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos was in the hallways of Robb Elementary School. Soon he entered a fourth-grade classroom. And there, he killed 19 schoolchildren and two teachers in a still-unexplained spasm of violence.

At 12:58 p.m., law enforcement radio chatter said Ramos had been killed and the siege was over.

What happened in those 90 minutes, in a working-class neighborhood near the edge of the little town of Uvalde, has fueled mounting public anger and scrutiny over law enforcement's response to Tuesday's rampage.

"They say they rushed in," said Javier Cazares, whose fourth-grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, and who raced to the school as the massacre unfolded. "We didn't see that."

On Thursday, authorities largely ignored questions about why officers had not been able to stop the shooter sooner, with Victor Escalon, regional director for the Texas Department of Public Safety, telling reporters he had "taken all those questions into consideration" and would offer updates later.

The media briefing, called by Texas safety officials to clarify the timeline of the attack, provided bits of previously unknown information. But by the time it ended, it had added to the troubling questions surrounding the attack, including about the time it took police to reach the scene and confront the gunman, and the apparent failure to lock a school door he entered.

After two days of providing often conflicting information, investigators said that a school district police officer was not inside the school when Ramos arrived, and, contrary to their previous reports, the officer had not confronted Ramos outside the building.

Instead, they sketched out a timeline notable for unexplained delays by law enforcement.

After crashing his truck, Ramos fired on two people coming out of a nearby funeral home, Escalon said. He then entered the school "unobstructed" through an apparently unlocked door at about 11:40 a.m.

But the first police officers did not arrive on the scene until 12 minutes after the crash and did not enter the school to pursue the shooter until four minutes after that. Inside, they were driven back by gunfire from Ramos and took cover, Escalon said.

The crisis came to an end after a group of Border Patrol tactical officers entered the school roughly an hour later, at 12:45 p.m., said Texas Department of Public Safety spokesperson Travis Considine. They engaged in a shootout with the gunman, who was holed up in the fourth-grade classroom. Moments before 1 p.m., he was dead.

Escalon said that during that time, the officers called for backup, negotiators and tactical teams, while evacuating students and teachers.

Ken Trump, president of the consulting firm National School Safety and Security Services, said the length of the timeline raised questions.

"Based on best practices, it's very difficult to understand why there were any types of delays, particularly when you get into reports of 40 minutes and up of going in to neutralize that shooter," he said.

Many other details of the case and the response remained murky. The motive for the massacre — the nation's deadliest school shooting since Newtown, Connecticut, almost a decade ago — remained under investigation, with authorities saying Ramos had no known criminal or mental health history.

During the siege, frustrated onlookers urged police officers to charge into the school, according to witnesses.

“Go in there! Go in there!” women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, said Juan Carranza, 24, who watched the scene from outside a house across the street.

Carranza said the officers should have entered the school sooner: “There were more of them. There was just one of him.”

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As for the armed school officer, he was driving nearby but was not on campus when Ramos crashed his truck, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss the case and spoke of condition of anonymity.

Investigators have concluded that school officer was not positioned between the school and Ramos, leaving him unable to confront the shooter before he entered the building, the law enforcement official said.

Michael Dorn, executive director of Safe Havens International, which works to make schools safer, cautioned that it’s hard to get a clear understanding of the facts soon after a shooting.

“The information we have a couple of weeks after an event is usually quite different than what we get in the first day or two. And even that is usually quite inaccurate,” Dorn said. For catastrophic events, “you’re usually eight to 12 months out before you really have a decent picture.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 DOJ: no charges in botched Nassar probe
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/wireStory/charges-agents-botched-larry-nassar-probe-85012017
GIST	DETROIT -- The U.S. Justice Department said Thursday it will not pursue criminal charges against former FBI agents who failed to quickly open an investigation of sports doctor Larry Nassar despite learning in 2015 that he was accused of sexually assaulting female gymnasts.

The agency's inspector general found that two former agents likely provided “inaccurate or incomplete information” when investigators subsequently tried to understand what happened, but more would be needed to file charges, the department said.

“This does not in any way reflect a view that the investigation of Nassar was handled as it should have been, nor in any way reflects approval or disregard of the conduct of the former agents,” the department said.

The government last fall said it would take another look at an earlier decision to forgo charges. At the time, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco told Congress that she had asked the newly confirmed head of the department's criminal division to review the case.

Nassar was a Michigan State University sports doctor as well as a doctor at USA Gymnastics. He is serving decades in prison for assaulting female athletes, including medal-winning Olympians.

Indianapolis-based USA Gymnastics told FBI agents in 2015 that three gymnasts said they were assaulted by Nassar. But the FBI did not open a formal investigation or inform federal or state authorities in Michigan, according to the inspector general’s report.

Los Angeles FBI agents in 2016 began a sexual tourism investigation against Nassar and interviewed several victims but also didn’t alert Michigan authorities, the inspector general said.

Nassar was finally arrested in November 2016 during an investigation by Michigan State University police.

At a Senate hearing in 2021, FBI Director Christopher Wray apologized to Nassar's victims, saying it was “inexcusable” that agents “had their own chance to stop this monster back in 2015 and failed.”

The FBI fired an agent; another one retired. The FBI has also adopted recommendations by the inspector general.

Lawyers for Nassar's victims have said more than 100 young women or teens were assaulted after the FBI became aware of allegations against him. At least 13 are seeking \$10 million each from the government.

John Manly said it's “incomprehensible” that agents and others will not be prosecuted.

“The FBI agents who knew of Nassar’s abuse, did nothing, and then lied about their inaction in violation of their sworn duty and the law have been given a pass,” Manly said.

[Return to Top](#)

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[Return to Top](#)